This is a digital copy of a book that was preserved for generations on library shelves before it was carefully scanned by Google as part of a project to make the world's books discoverable online.

It has survived long enough for the copyright to expire and the book to enter the public domain. A public domain book is one that was never subject to copyright or whose legal copyright term has expired. Whether a book is in the public domain may vary country to country. Public domain books are our gateways to the past, representing a wealth of history, culture and knowledge that's often difficult to discover.

Marks, notations and other marginalia present in the original volume will appear in this file - a reminder of this book's long journey from the publisher to a library and finally to you.

Usage guidelines

Google is proud to partner with libraries to digitize public domain materials and make them widely accessible. Public domain books belong to the public and we are merely their custodians. Nevertheless, this work is expensive, so in order to keep providing this resource, we have taken steps to prevent abuse by commercial parties, including placing technical restrictions on automated querying.

We also ask that you:

+ *Make non-commercial use of the files* We designed Google Book Search for use by individuals, and we request that you use these files for personal, non-commercial purposes.
+ *Refrain from automated querying* Do not send automated queries of any sort to Google's system: If you are conducting research on machine translation, optical character recognition or other areas where access to a large amount of text is helpful, please contact us. We encourage the use of public domain materials for these purposes and may be able to help.
+ *Maintain attribution* The Google "watermark" you see on each file is essential for informing people about this project and helping them find additional materials through Google Book Search. Please do not remove it.
+ *Keep it legal* Whatever your use, remember that you are responsible for ensuring that what you are doing is legal. Do not assume that just because we believe a book is in the public domain for users in the United States, that the work is also in the public domain for users in other countries. Whether a book is still in copyright varies from country to country, and we can't offer guidance on whether any specific use of any specific book is allowed. Please do not assume that a book's appearance in Google Book Search means it can be used in any manner anywhere in the world. Copyright infringement liability can be quite severe.

About Google Book Search

Google's mission is to organize the world's information and to make it universally accessible and useful. Google Book Search helps readers discover the world's books while helping authors and publishers reach new audiences. You can search through the full text of this book on the web at `http://books.google.com/`

THE WOMAN THAT'S GOOD.

THE NEW YORK
PUBLIC LIBRARY
426003A
ASTOR, LENOX AND
TILDEN FOUNDATIONS
R 1929 L

Copyright, 1900, by Rand, McNally & Co.

DEDICATION.

Ho, gentlemen! lift your glasses up—
  Each gallant, each swain and lover—
A kiss to the beads that brim in the cup,
  A laugh for the foam spilt over!
For the soul is a-lilt and the heart beats high,
  And care has unloosed its tether:
"Now drink," said the sage, "for to-morrow we die!"
  So, let's have a toast together.
Swing the goblet aloft; to the lips let it fall;
  Then bend you the knee to address her;
And drink, gentle sirs, to the queen of us all—
  To the Woman that's Good—God bless her!

O, Youth is a madcap, and Time is a churl!
  Pleasure palls, and Remorse follows after;
The world hurtles on in its pitiless whirl,
  With its kisses, its tears, and its laughter;
But there's one gentle heart, in its bosom of white—
  Dear Love with the tender eyes gleaming,
Who has all the wealth of my homage to-night,
  Where she lies in her innocent dreaming—
And a watch o'er her ever my spirit shall keep,
  While the angels lean down to caress her;
And I'll pledge her again, in her beautiful sleep,—
  The Woman that's Good—God bless her!

Ah, Bohemia's honey was sweet to the sip,
  And the song and the dance were alluring—
(The mischievous maid with the mutinous lip
  Had a charm that was very enduring)—
But out from the music and smoke-wreaths and lace
  Of that world of the tawdrily clever,
There floats the rare spell of the pure little face
  That has chased away folly forever!
And I pledge my last toast, ere I go to my rest—
  O fortunate earth to possess her!—
To the dear tender heart in the little white breast
  Of the Woman that's Good—God bless her!

The Woman That's Good

CHAPTER I

A CHANCE MEETING IN "OLD VIENNA"

"Suppose we go," said Scott.

"No," languidly demurred Gaunt. "I want to hear that fellow play his cornet. Here, in the open air, his playing is very nearly perfection. It would doubtless be loathsome under cover. All brass music is."

Scott did not deny it, but he seemed restless. "I promised Kitty I'd be down in time to take her to supper," he protested, looking at his watch, "and I shall barely have time as it is. I think—"

Gaunt rose to his feet suddenly. "A man who keeps appointments with his own wife," he said cheerily, "deserves to be encouraged. I shall not tempt you, George."

The two men were moving away arm-in-arm when the paragon of virtue who had not been ashamed to admit his anxiety to keep his promise to his lawful partner stopped short. "There's that odious little Fairleigh and his wife," he whispered, in obvious terror; "if they see me they'll pester me for an engagement and I'll never get away. Let's sit down again a minute. Perhaps they'll go."

They returned to their table, and a waiter, at a sign from Gaunt, brought bottles and glasses. On such pitifully trivial chances does Fate love to hinge vital issues.

Before the people whom Scott had found so objectionable had even thought of moving, his recollection of his own appointment with his wife had been swept from his mind and his friend, Eustace Gaunt, reduced to a condition bordering on stupor. The two miracles were performed by one agency—a pair of blue eyes sufficiently marvelous to excuse either.

It all happened very swiftly and very simply. Gaunt had felt a fan lightly tapping his shoulder, and turned to see and greet Hattie Leal, a terrible little person who drank cocktails and wrote for newspapers. Behind Miss Leal stood a tall, slim figure in a blue dress at whom she pointed with two fingers, as she said airily, "My sister, Mrs. St. Judas, Mr. Gaunt." Gaunt introduced his friend, and the ladies, without much urging, accepted seats at the table.

The fit of amazement into which Gaunt immediately fell, and from which he found it impossible to extricate himself, was due to his inability to comprehend how Nature could have cast two such women from the same mould. He knew Hattie Leal rather well. Her ideas, tastes and sympathies were in a measure borne out by her appearance. It was impossible to look twice at Mrs. St. Judas and believe her to be her sister.

The little newspaper person's face was round, dark, impish—a rollicking, devil-may-care face, of the type that can laugh at age and defy experience. Her sister's face was of waxen whiteness and wore an expression of such infinite purity and peace that Gaunt, who was something of a dreamer, instinctively caught himself wishing that he could say his prayers to it. It was, however, in the lady's eyes that her amazing power of fascination lay. They were very large eyes, violet rather than blue, and, being shaded by the jettiest of lashes and brows, they exercised, in contrast with the milky whiteness of her cheeks, an effect little short of tremendous. Eyes of this kind may be made effective in a variety of ways.

It was characteristic of the delightful disregard of convention pervading the World's Fair period that these two young women should be traversing that wondrous and never-to-be-forgotten Midway at ten o'clock in the evening, quite unchaperoned. Miss Leal, however, with a flash of her not unhandsome teeth and an ironical compunction in her tones, begged Gaunt not to be shocked. "We've just left a lot of Commissioners and their wives," she twittered. "Been awfully bored. How do you like my sister?"

Gaunt was nearly thirty, but he blushed. The directness of the query disconcerted him. He stole a glance at Mrs. St. Judas. That lady was smiling in a manner at once dreamy and delicious. The blue eyes were catechising him lazily from beneath half-closed lids. The sensation that the look awakened in him was unusual and peculiar. It defied analysis. It was one partly of terror, partly of pleasure unspeakable. He was perplexed and repelled, enchanted and mystified.

"And now," cooed Miss Leal, "I may have something nice and cool to drink, may I not?"

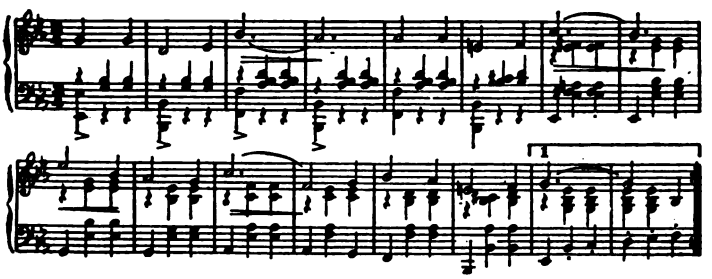
Gaunt apologized for his remissness, and the young lady, who was as famous for her thirst as for her covertly wicked fashion-letters in a widely read "society" paper, was made happy with a tall glass full of chopped ice, stabbed with two straws. Gaunt tilted his chair back and puffed rings of smoke into the air from a long and deliciously mild cigar. He could not have explained the feeling, but he felt irritated on discovering that his friend Scott, like himself, had been thrown into a sort of trance by the astounding beauty of Hattie Leal's sister. Scott was an agreeable fellow, despite his calling—that of a theatrical manager—and he did not possess the ability to conceal his emotions. He stared at Mrs. St. Judas as if she had been a broiled partridge and he one of his own chorus girls. And Gaunt did not like it.

And then, before any of the four had time to speak again, the music fell upon the air of the mellow August night,

softly and gently, like a benediction. Memories of World's Fair days—of that mad, merry time of carnival and riot that none who shared in will ever forget—are stale and profitless enough by this time; but that exquisite band of white-coated Austrian players, who made melody only less irresistible than the moonlight, cannot, in common gratitude, be forgotten. Gaunt, as I have hinted, was something of a poet and a good deal of a dreamer. Though by nature of a mercurial, buoyant temperament, his mind was filled, in moments of idleness like this, with the causeless and indefinable discontent with life that is the cheerful curse of all poets. But to-night he was stimulated, elated. He did not know that for him the whole atmosphere of the world had changed within the last ten minutes—from the moment, in fact, that he had met that peculiar, slanting glance from the marvelous blue eyes—and that with his first taste of a sensation as delightful as it was new, he was entering upon a period of varied and picturesque disaster. What he did know was that the bland August moon was smiling down benignly upon a most charming picture; that the wine was good and wholesome; that the place was gay with the glimmering lights and the dainty feminine costumes that his eyes loved; that waltz music beautiful enough to charm a vaultful of mummies back to life was sending his soul into Dreamland, and that he had only to glance across a narrow expanse of white tablecloth in order to enjoy the sensation of commingled trepidation and delight that he had first found so alluring.

The cornet player of whom he had spoken to Scott presently began his nightly solo. It established the proposition that even a cornet may at times be endurable. The man's performance was really creditable, and in that tolerant atmosphere, in which the charm of wine possibly tempered the judgment of his critics, it easily passed for something artistic. He played on a silver instrument, and the tones were as gentle and as exquisitely modulated as a 'cello

obligato to an Ave Maria. It was a wretched little clap-trap air that he crooned out, but against a background of strings, faultlessly attuned, it sounded captivating enough. For long years afterwards—some of them exceedingly bitter years—that tune rang through Gaunt's brain, bringing memories of a night so picturesquely fatal that it always amused him to think of it:



So the thing ran. The audience, mellow with wine and romantic with moonlight, applauded rapturously as the last faint notes died away, and Gaunt sighed. He had been leaning back, dreaming, his hands clasped behind his head, his cigar held lightly between his teeth and his straw hat bent forward over his eyes. He was trying with all his might to resist the tremendous and extraordinary fascination exercised upon him by this woman and finding a secret and guilty gratification in recognizing his inability to do so. He was in the midst of a little world of romance all his own when he sighed again—deeply, this time. He had occasion. Hattie Leal had begun to chatter, and when that young woman chattered it was impossible to think of anything but the world, the flesh and the devil.

"I've met forty different kinds of more or less distinguished men to-day," she chirped, "and tried forty different kinds of villainous drinks. Funny, what a beautiful and bountiful spirit of hospitality this World's Fair of yours seems to engender. Everybody you meet wants to 'blow

you off,—that's the term, isn't it? Perhaps they do it for me because they know I come from Washington, and think I need educating. It's just as well, though. The Midway wouldn't look the same if you didn't view it hazily, through a mist of cocktails. Would it, dear?"

"Hattie Leal," expostulated the sister, "how can you talk so?"

A thrill went through Gaunt. So soft and bell-like were the tones of this charmer's voice that his thoughts flew to surpliced choirs and painted altars and similar sacred things. The feeling of reverence that she inspired in him made him wonder how she could live in the same house with her sister and not suffocate. But the terrible Hattie began again.

"What's your friend's weakness—morphine or hasheesh?" she blithely inquired of Gaunt, nodding in the direction of poor Scott, who was gazing at Mrs. St. Judas in a sort of blind stupor, with his glass half raised to his lips.

"Neither," responded the young man, rather surlily, "he's thinking of an appointment he's missed with his wife and that another man will have to keep it for him."

"How charming," sighed Hattie, "he ought to be grateful, I think."

The bell-like voice of Mrs. St. Judas was heard again. "Don't you think we had better go now, dear?" she urged. "It is getting late, and I am beginning to feel tired."

Gaunt rose at once. "Let us all go," he said briskly, and Mrs. St. Judas thanked him with a movement of the eyebrows. She knew, and she had guessed that he knew, the difficulty of luring her elder sister away from a region of good cheer if the question of departure were left open to debate.

They left the place, gay with its brightly clad women, the everlasting popping of corks and the reiterated crooning of the cornetist's air, which some enthusiast had redemanded. Gaunt contrived without much difficulty to send the other two on ahead. He and Mrs. St. Judas followed slowly.

As they paced side by side down the wide roadway, along which people were streaming in the direction of the gates, Gaunt stole glances over his left shoulder at his companion's exquisite profile. She caught him at it, and turning, flashed a look of challenge squarely into his eyes. "Well," she demanded, musically, "what do you think of me?"

The young man answered her look with one in which solemnity and pathos were equally blended. "I was thinking," he said slowly, "how much I regret that your name is—what it is."

"Ah!" sighed the lady, showing two rows of delicious teeth, "you mean because of the book?"

"Yes," he admitted, inwardly berating himself for a prig.

"The book" was a nightmare, certainly—it had been suppressed in some cities, so he had heard—but who was he, to pass judgment, unasked, upon its author, especially as she was beautiful enough to secure pardon for much graver crimes?

"Not that it is really so awful," he added, lamely, "but now that I have seen you, I—well, I scarcely know how to put it, but you really look too good to have written it."

The lady laughed lightly. (Her laugh, by the way, was as musical as her speech, ascending, as it did, gently, in a mellifluous chromatic scale and concluding with a descending sixth—a most delicate and fetching performance.) "That is the prettiest compliment that was ever paid me. Do you really mean that I look—good?" She turned her head and looked him in the eyes, contracting her brows ever so slightly as she asked the question.

Gaunt met the look and drew a deep breath. "Yes," he answered, simply and honestly, "I do. It is perhaps clownish to say it on such short acquaintance, but you have the type of face one sees in dim old portrait galleries and in children's picture-books of the saints. It's a sin to have put your name to a book like 'A Flirtation with Fate.' Why don't you write hymns or something?"

Mrs. St. Judas laughed again, though she had looked very serious when the young man was speaking. She did not answer immediately, but walked along in silence, and with decreased pace; for the crowd grew denser as they neared the gates. Gaunt watched her narrowly, with an emotion very closely resembling delight. The grace of her movement was a constant revelation and charm. She walked with a long, easy stride, with scarcely a motion of the body from the hips up, her skirts held in the clasp of a hand so small it looked almost ridiculous. She was nearly as tall as he, and the regal poise of her head, on the beautiful white pillar of her neck, made him think of empresses and queens. Her masses of black hair, coiled and held in place in some marvelous fashion beneath her jaunty sailor hat, contrasted most effectively with the dazzling whiteness of her skin. It was no wonder that the young man was impressed.

Before they reached the gate, she placed the finger-tips of a babyish hand on his arm and said softly, "I have heard so much of you from my sister. I am glad we have met."

"I feel deeply grateful to her," replied Gaunt promptly, "for having such a sister, and to Fate for letting me find it out."

He meant the words as he uttered them, but as he met the young woman's gaze, fully and fairly, once more, there shot through his brain a feeling of dread as inexplicable as it was acute. The blue eyes seemed to look through and through him, and in their depths there lurked, if he saw aright, a menace and a snare. He was trembling when he assisted her into the car.

The journey to Miss Leal's abode was uneventful, save for the good-natured chattering of that lady and the palpable grief of Scott in being compelled to listen to her instead of enjoying the felicity of talking to Mrs. St. Judas. The latter detained Gaunt a moment before entering the house. "I have a confession to make to you," she announced, mischievously, in a musical half-whisper.

Gaunt drew closer. He saw that she did not wish her sister to hear. His lips formed a noiseless interrogation.

"I did not write 'A Flirtation with Fate,'" she declared.

Gaunt's face showed his surprise. "Then who did?" he asked, still in an undertone.

"My sister"—this rather mournfully.

The young man breathed a sigh of relief. "Then," he hazarded, "you are not?—"

"Not Mrs. St. Judas. You are right. Mrs. St. Judas is—Hattie. I am Imogen Leal—*Miss* Imogen Leal." She favored him with another long look, that caused his heartbeats to quicken somewhat, and turning, ran up the steps, lightly and gracefully, to join her sister.

The two men bowed and departed. Gaunt, thoroughly surprised, could not account for his sensations. The "confession," as this rather remarkable girl had called the confidence she had just extended to him, afforded him a degree of pleasure out of all keeping with its importance. He had known her barely an hour and he was already feeling inclined to thank his Maker for two things—that she belonged to no man, and that she had not written an impure book. Obviously, the impression made upon him by her was a strong one. He recognized the fact and it annoyed him.

"Old man," vowed his friend Scott, with the brutal frankness that intelligent men of his profession know so well how to display at inopportune times, "that young woman is a wonder. If she has a voice anything like her face, I could make her everlasting fortune in three months."

Gaunt shuddered. He liked Scott, but there were moments when he wished his friend could appreciate the loveliness of silence. A passing car rescued him, for his companion, with a cheery good-night, boarded it and left him to walk down the moonlit street in solitude. He was grateful, and enjoyed the stroll to his house, where his wife, who he knew was too well-bred to sit up for him, even though she were to find sleep impossible, awaited his coming with resignation.

CHAPTER II

FLIRTING WITH FIRE

Eustace Gaunt was a man who had reached the age of thirty without being able to understand himself. His life had been a severe one, inasmuch as he had been compelled to battle for his own living from his sixteenth year; but his triumph over circumstances had been so complete and so continuous that the effect of the warfare sat lightly upon him. He had always found himself able to win enough for his needs without any serious effort. It was the habit of his friends, when they wished to bore him quite beyond endurance, to tell him that whenever he chose to give his talents full play he could have the world at his feet. He believed this readily enough, for he was not free from vanity; but it did not interest him. A man of thirty, in sound health and of presentable appearance, is never gifted with too much sense; if born with a smattering of poetry in his soul he is tolerably certain to go on manifesting symptoms of imbecility for several years longer.

Gaunt's chief fault—a fault, for a man in his circumstances, so grave as to amount to a crime—was his total inability to take life seriously. Even his marriage, which had developed some of the most agreeable qualities in his nature, had failed to eradicate from it others that were quite without excuse. He could not see, when existence was all sunshine, why it should be necessary to invite despondency and discontent by devoting his mind to the consideration of material things. He had a ready brain, and it provided him, through his writings, with a competence. For fame he cared nothing. That, he argued to himself, would come to him in good season if he deserved it; if he did not, he would not gratify Fate by striving for it fruitlessly. So long as Providence permitted him to do his duty by all men, and

gave him time, in addition, to indulge in his dreams, he was content. By some, the young man was called an idler; which was unjust. There had never been a time since his early youth when he had not been compelled, as I say, to wrestle for his living. He simply declined to exert himself to a tiresome extent in the effort to secure distinction; that was all.

To-night the dreamer had more closely approached a recognition of the gravity of certain natural laws—notably the law of conscience—than ever before. He was walking up the boulevard with a rather unhappy look on his boyish face. It had dawned upon him that, for the first time in his memory, he was cheating his wife. This in itself would not have seemed so grave a matter if his accomplice had not been a woman of her own station of life. This thought brought him discomfort. Since the meeting with Imogen Leal in Old Vienna, he had been beset by a fascination as powerful as it was inexplicable and sudden. The two had held several interviews, and the folly was apparently mutual. Neither had tried to account for it, and both, in a sense, were victims.

When, ten minutes later, he stood in Imogen Leal's presence, the cloud had disappeared. He looked radiant, and the lady, marking his youthful buoyancy and his well-groomed exterior, did him the honor to feel pleased thereat. A glorious blush came into the white cheeks, at sight of which Gaunt, ever impetuous, started forward and would have captured her hands and kissed them gallantly, but she pushed him gently away, smiling rather sadly as she did so. "No, dear," she said, gravely and reprovingly, "you are to sit over there, so! and tell me—everthing. See how comfortable I will make you." She piled cushions behind his head and shoulders and brought him a light for his cigarette. "There!" she cried, bravely, when her womanly ministrations were ended, "being a man, it is proper that you should be pampered. We love to pamper you, although we pretend we don't. Now, we must talk seriously."

Gaunt had watched her narrowly while she was speaking,

and had little difficulty in discovering that her lightness of manner was a pretense. He met her glance for an instant as she sank into a low chair opposite to him and noticed, as her eyes drooped, that the long lashes had a suspicion of moisture upon them. He noticed, also, how marvelously well her white dress became her, and his practiced eye beamed its approval.

She presently leaned forward a little, and placed her hands over her face. "I am very, very wicked," she sighed, dismally.

Gaunt was beside her in an instant. He possessed himself of one of the hands, unrebuked this time, and leaning over her, whispered eagerly, "You are not wicked. You shall not say it. Perhaps it is a crime for me to have grown fond of you, and to have told you of it. You could not help that. You are not to blame."

The girl shook her head sadly. "That will not do, dear," she protested. "You try to save me from my own self-reproach, and it is generous of you; but it will not do. The blame is all mine. I let you speak. I let you tell me what you did. I am letting you stay here now. You see, I am the guilty one."

Gaunt began pacing nervously up and down the little apartment—a habit he had when under emotional strain. Presently he paused and placed his hand, in a paternal, protecting fashion, on the bowed head. Stooping over her, he whispered gently, "I will not let you accuse yourself. I have not known you long, but you have taught me to reverence you for your goodness as well as to love you for—yourself. I—"

"Oh, hush, dear!" murmured the girl, rising hurriedly. She stood and faced him a moment and placing her hands on his shoulders, looked long and earnestly into his eyes. Gaunt absorbed the gaze thirstily. For one instant it brought him a delight unspeakable. Then came the sensation of strange, unreasoning dread that had assailed him on the night of the meeting in Old Vienna. It lasted but an in-

stant, and as he met the sad glance of the blue eyes, his own grew dark and luminous with the greatness of his passion. From his momentary dream of the impossible he was awakened by the sound of her voice.

She spoke in low tones, soft as velvet, sonorous as the vibrations of a harp. "Tell me," she asked, with inconceivable appeal, "do you mean that? Do not answer me lightly. *You* love *me*?"

The young man turned white. He knew that the answer, if truthfully given, would stamp him as something very despicable in his own eyes. Yet, marvelous as it may seem, so mighty was his adoration of this amazingly beautiful charmer, that he flinched at the thought of telling her an untruth rather than at that of convicting himself of disloyalty to his wife. As a consequence he leaned forward and whispered the time-honored platitude, "I love you."

So far there had been no physical demonstration of affection between these two. Up to this time their insanity had been purely verbal. The girl now swayed almost imperceptibly towards the man and insinuated herself into his embrace with a movement that would have signified abandon if it had not been so studiously graceful. For the merest fraction of a second their lips met. Gaunt closed his eyes. The odor of hyacinths came to him, faintly, as his cheek brushed her hair. He thought for one instant, as ardent young men of poetic temperament have thought before, in similar situations, that he had died and gone a-floating in cloudland.

After this embrace and this kiss—after all, it was really a peck rather than a kiss—there was silence. Each looked at the other guiltily. Imogen Leal spoke first. "There is too much light here," she said dreamily; "it makes my head ache."

As a matter of simple fact, there was but one gas jet burning, and as the young lady raised a taper hand to lower it, it went out altogether. She gave a little gasp of dismay. The room was in darkness, save for the moonlight that

slanted obliquely through the open windows. Gaunt, who believed in the genuineness of the accident, took her hand and led her over into the broad white rays. She stood there, tall, graceful and ethereal in her shimmering white gown. There was a quiver in Gaunt's voice as he asked her, inanely enough: "Why do you ask me if I love you, when you know it already?"

She blushed in a heavenly fashion. "I wanted to hear you say it," she confessed, in low tones. "It is all dreadfully wrong and wicked, I know, but I cannot help it. I did not plan it, Eustace. Do you know I think my heart is breaking?"

The young man took a step forward and laid his arm gently across her shoulders, drawing her towards him. "As God lives, dear," he vowed tenderly, "I would undo it all if I could. The thought that I cause you distress is intolerable to me and yet it is impossible for me to even think of giving you up. Fate has played us a sorry trick, I fear, no matter upon whom may rest the blame."

"Tell me," murmured his fair accomplice in idiocy, pinning him more hopelessly into servitude with another languorous gaze of the pathetic blue eyes, "when did you first begin to love me?"

"When you were born, I think," answered Gaunt gently, stroking her brow and hair softly with his disengaged hand. "Ever since I have known you," he went on, dreamily, "it has seemed as if we had met somewhere, long ago—in another world, maybe—and that some chain of mysterious accidents has kept us apart until now. It seems as if I had known you since the beginning of my life, and that the rest of it will be without worth or beauty unless I see you every day."

She smiled gravely but indulgently—what woman ever failed to exhibit indulgence toward an admirer who declaimed on the impossibility of life without her?—but protested: "But you cannot do that. You know I am going home very soon."

Gaunt frowned and bit his lip. "I try not to think of that," he said, a little hoarsely; "pray do not remind me of it." (She pursed up her mouth and cooed at him prettily as a reward for this outburst.) "I sometimes try," he continued, "to account for the miracle you have worked in me. It is useless. I cannot. I know my love is a crime against my own conscience, but it is not an insult to you; because I hold you in such reverence that I cannot wrong you by so much as a thought. I only know that you have made life ineffably sweet to me, and that I shall be very wretched after you have gone away."

His voice fell to a whisper. She stood on tiptoe and laid her cheek softly against his own. "Will you," she murmured slowly, "always—love—me?"

"Always," answered the man. He was looking into her eyes, and while he did so, meant what he said. An hour later, as he was taking his leave, Miss Imogen Leal, of Washington, again placed her two hands lightly on his shoulders—her favorite pose when she desired to be both charming and impressive—and said, very solemnly: "Dear, listen a moment. You have made your confession. Hear mine: Because you are good and gentle and brave—I love you. Because you are tender and chivalrous—I love you. Because you are generous—giving all, asking nothing—I love you. And because I love you, I am going away. After to-night, dear, we must not meet."

Gaunt bowed his head in acquiescence. He made no appeal from this decision. The young lady looked mortified. I am not quite certain, but I believe there was another kiss. It sent the young man away with a singing in his ears and a cloud in his brain. As he left the house a brougham drove up to it and Mrs. Hattie St. Judas descended, not without sore labor, to the sidewalk.

Gaunt would gladly have escaped, for his mind was filled with disquieting thoughts and he had no wish for an exchange of ideas with this rather distressing person. She spied him, however, and came running at him in half-circles,

serpentine fashion, at the same time pointing a parasol at him as though she would impale him upon it.

"Hello, Gauntsy, old boy," she exclaimed blithely, with an intonation that danced and ricocheted over the waves of enthusiasm created by a damp dinner, "where've you been? Ah, I know,"—she steadied herself with great skill and prodded at him skittishly with the silken weapon—"you've been to see my sister."

Gaunt, to do him justice, looked both troubled and shocked. He had no wish that any part of such a conversation should be overheard, and to his own ears the young woman's words sounded like a profanation. He moved forward and took the bibulous little night-owl by the arm. "Let me help you up the stairs, Hattie," he urged.

"Thanks," was the young woman's sleepy response. She leaned forward and permitted him to assist her. "Good old boy," she murmured, forgetting her dignity in the warmth of her gratitude for the support of his arm; "but say, Gauntsy, don't you dare go making love to her now, will you? Imogen's the patron saint of our fam'ly. She has to be good for both of us, don't you see? Lerrer alone now, won't you, old chap?"

"Oh, hush!" implored Gaunt, with whitening lips. He could not bear the thought of the "saint" knowing that he had encountered her sister in this regrettable situation or of her hearing such liberties taken with her name. He knew better than to try to reason with Miss Hattie Leal (or, to give her her correct name, with Mrs. St. Judas) under these circumstances. He simply hoisted her to the top step, and left her there, swaying gently from side to side, like a pendulum in petticoats. He plunged to the sidewalk with a bound and walked off at a smart pace, failing, however, to deafen his ears to the young woman's shrilly repeated command concerning her sister. The "lerrer alone—lerrer alone," repeated with ever-increasing vehemence, rang through the otherwise beautiful night until he turned the corner.

CHAPTER III

A CONFLICT OF EMOTIONS

Where the woman and the child slept, there was a faint light burning. The bed was in shadow, but the two heads upon the pillows—the dark-haired one of the mother and the shining gold of the infant's—were easily discernible. They were very close together; so close that their cheeks almost touched and their two breaths mingled. It was a gracious picture.

Gaunt entered on tiptoe, entirely without noise, an accomplishment in which he had perfected himself by long practice. He tossed his cigarette into the fireplace and turned the lights even lower. He did not think his wife would awake, but in the event of her doing so, he was not anxious that she should look in his face just then.

His heart was filled with a desperate and excruciating impatience. He was in savage ill-humor with himself for a weakness he had found impossible of control, and, man-like, he was ready to bestow the blame upon any and every one in the world but the actual culprit. He almost felt incensed against his wife, because the thought of the wrong he was doing her troubled him. To his disordered imagination it seemed as if she were inflicting an injustice upon him by her very innocence—in causing him such infinite self-reproach. Insane as such a line of reasoning may appear, it is followed by more lightly stepping modern husbands than some people think.

The romance of his attachment for this royal-eyed maid from the East had fastened itself upon Gaunt's mind with a great and exceeding strength. It had carried him back, in memory, to the years before his marriage, when life had been even more of a laugh and a song than it was at present,

because then he had been without responsibilities or restraining ties of any kind. The very foolhardiness and impossibility of it had stimulated his senses and aroused all the poetry in his nature. The affair appealed to him as no coarser one could have done. For that matter, Gaunt was not the type of man that finds attraction in coarse attachments. Had he believed Imogen Leal one whit less worthy of reverence than his fancy pictured her, he would not have given her a second thought. Is it really chivalry, I wonder, or merely a certain amusing form of vanity, that superinduces this belief—in support of which we are ready to fight at any moment—in the unassailable virtue of the ladies that unbend to us? Do we believe them good because they look so, or because we are modest, and know that a barrier proving impregnable to ourselves no rival may hope to scale?

It was this belief in the beauty of character possessed by the girl for whose sake he had permitted his heart and brain to play him such pranks that now occasioned Gaunt such serious discomfort. His knowledge of his wife's nature was reasonably accurate. He knew she might possibly brook flippancy of conduct on his part with a rival of no moral or social consequence—with an equal, never. This disquieting thought had been with the young man rather frequently of late. It was with him now, as he stood before his dressing-table in the dim light, trying to unfasten a very tall and obstinate collar without profanity.

A sudden impulse caused him to turn, when partly undressed, and step softly to the foot of the bed. A glance told him that its occupants were still sound asleep. He himself was not even drowsy. It interested him to stand so, and watch them.

The child had crawled out of his crib, as Gaunt had known him to do before, to console his mother in the hours of waiting for the absent one, and he now lay with one little rosy leg and foot sprawling over the coverlet and his face turned to the patient parent face beside him. His tiny pink

fingers were caught and entwined in the lace at the sleeping woman's throat and his yellow curls brushed her cheek. The man saw all this, and there arose in his soul a something that cried out against the detestable weakness that enraged and revolted at the same time that it mastered and enslaved him. He saw before him treasures in defense of which he would have laid down his life and marveled at the miracle of mischance that made it impossible for him to appreciate them at their proper value. He knew the extent of his folly without being able to combat it, and the sense of his unworthiness went through him like a sword.

In the dim light he watched his wife's face, placid and calm in the beautiful slumber of health and of youth. It was as fair and sweet as in the days of their first courtship, when she, as merry and light-hearted a maid as ever laughed the hours away, had stolen out of school to accompany him to matinees. But when he leaned forward to look more closely, he saw, about the tender mouth and the closed eyes, certain lines, for the translation of which he required no interpreter. Lines of anxiety and sorrow—a defacement of his making. Such lines, when visible upon a face too young to merit so grievous a disfigurement, are to a certain degree pathetic. Gaunt had not observed them until to-night. Now that he did so, the sense of his responsibility for the outrage almost overcame him. He felt like a man who awakens after a long carouse to find that he has thrust his elbow through a priceless painting.

Suddenly the child stirred and opened his eyes. He fastened them, slowly and wonderingly at first, and then rapturously, upon the figure at the foot of the bed. He was fond of his father, and his little features expanded into a sleepy grin of delight as he recognized him. He would have spoken, but Gaunt silenced him with one motion, at the same time beckoning to him with another. The urchin came crawling on all fours to give his embrace to the man who hungered for it, and then returned, obediently and

noiselessly, at a whispered command, to his rest. His mother, who had not awakened, turned and drew him closely to her, murmuring indistinguishable words of endearment.

After this, Gaunt turned the lights out entirely and sat for some time at the window, looking up at the starlit sky. He felt rather dishonest.

CHAPTER IV

THE RENEWAL OF AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE

A weekly journal, published in New York, and somewhat famous for its brilliant improprieties, had furnished the principal source of Gaunt's income for some months past. Four or five years before this he had been its editor; at which time it had been controlled by the brother of its present proprietor, a handsome and agile gentleman accustomed to dodging bills and bullets with equal facility. The young man had sent to this peculiar publication, which was fashioned somewhat after the lines of Mr. Labouchere's *Truth*, certain poems and paragraphs that had resulted in an almost immediate invitation to go to New York and assume its editorial management. After four months of rather arduous labor in the office of *The Fang*, he had returned to Chicago and the pursuit of journalism in that growing city. He had liked New York and had enjoyed the composition of bombastic editorials in the first person singular, beginning generally with "I am of the opinion," and ending with a threat of terrific punishment to some public or private evil-doer. That period of bliss, however, had had its drawbacks, the separation from his fiancée proving especially irksome. His return to the West had been followed very soon by his wedding, and for two years afterward he had lived under the impression that Heaven had dawned for his exclusive and

indefinite benefit. He had accepted his great happiness as a matter of course, lightly and airily, imagining, in the joyous and inordinate vanity of inexperience and of youth, that he must have done something to deserve it, or it would not have come to him.

The cause that had led to his forming a new connection with *The Fang*, after having almost forgotten the existence of the paper, was commonplace enough. At the time of his marriage he had been jogging along in comfortable obscurity as an editorial writer on the same old-established conservative evening newspaper that he had left to go to New York. This honest if unremunerative occupation he left to become the editor of a struggling weekly publication, that he might have succeeded in making permanently profitable if his partner, the publisher, a cheerful youth just out of Yale, who wore tennis flannels in the office and spent five hours at luncheon, had not cherished the delusion that he could expend four weeks' receipts from advertising in one day at the race-track and still win at the game of commerce. It was about the time this brilliant weekly was breathing its last that he had received a proposition from the new proprietor of *The Fang*, a military gentleman with a record as a financier, to write a page of paragraphs from Chicago each week for that paper. The money consideration being fair, he had accepted the proposal, the ease with which the work was performed being by no means the smallest consideration in its favor.

Having drifted, perhaps chiefly through indolence, into a style of journalism of the iniquities of which he had not then become aware, the young man rather enjoyed the sense of power and importance that his occupation gave him. *The Fang*, he knew, was as religiously read as it was cordially hated by society. The relentless ridicule to which he subjected the poseurs and charlatans of the local 400—or, as he had christened them, the 4,000—had very soon brought him an undesired prominence; some of the women and all of the men that he knew in society were constantly remon-

strating with him on the enormity of his conduct. To such remonstrances, however, Gaunt turned a deaf ear. He protested that he never wrote anything really ill-natured about anybody and that the people he guyed, being in every case deserving of the attention, derived more good than harm from the process. He had found, moreover, that in journalism it is the man who is feared who is respected; not the one who is loved; and was fond of declaring that while he had innumerable critics, he had, so far as he knew, no enemies. The severest denouncers of so-called personal journalism should admit that Chicago society, whatever it may have become since, afforded in those days a practically limitless field for satirical exploit. A graceless young free-lance like Gaunt could have asked for no finer opportunity for the exercise of his lively wit than that afforded by the ambitions and achievements of a one-generation aristocracy, half of which derived its wealth from the "store" and the other half from the packing-house or the grain-bin. The young man, however, cherished not a spark of malice towards any living being, and it pained him at times to reflect that he was associated, even in the capacity of resident correspondent, with a publication that had occupied the position for some years past, whether deservedly or otherwise, of an Ishmael among newspapers and a perpetual menace to the peace of society by reason of its thinly veiled allusions to current scandal. It was when in the company of his wife that this feeling came to him most strongly. To know that he himself was disliked, or feared, as the case might be, by people of position—in whose own conduct, maybe, lay the chief cause for their uneasiness—only amused him. To sit by his wife in a theater, or pace with her at his side across a ball-room floor—at which times he was inordinately vain of her—and to mark her fresh, childish beauty, knowing at the very moment he did so that she was being pointed at by a lot of pussy-cats and harpies, themselves unworthy to fasten her shoe-lace, as the wife of "that fearful young scamp Gaunt, who wrote for *The Fang*"—this was more or less

trying. For her, he felt it to be a handicap that no girl of gentle associations ought to be asked to carry at the very outset of her career. Not that she minded it—bless you, no. She was of an age and temperament that permitted the discovery of no fault in anything that her husband might do; indeed, so profound was her confidence in his perfection that in some way it had communicated itself to his own mind, enabling him to almost believe in it himself.

The Fang, as a specimen of periodical literature, was in most respects remarkable. Its brilliancy was as convincing as its moral tone was equivocal. Written, from the first sentence to the last, in English absolutely without flaw, and covering every phase of life and sphere of human thought in a way at once masterful and exhilarating, it would have found an honored place among the sparkling publications of the country if it had not been for the foundation of social gabble on which it was built and from which it derived its name and its enormous circulation. Its reviews were universally accepted as authoritative; it was in its society paragraphing that the flagrant offence of the paper lay. Some ten or twelve pages of these paragraphs, relating to events in various cities, formed the body of the paper—paragraphs frequently harmless, nearly always amusing, at times delicately and covertly wicked and at other bristling with innuendo too awful for translation. It was this part of *The Fang*, of course, that gained it the attention, as well as the detestation, of the people who read it so religiously from week to week; though there were other features, in addition to the above-mentioned departments, almost equally entertaining. Gaunt, for his part, rarely read the scandal paragraphs in the paper. Whenever he did so, he searched the realms of conjecture in vain for a reason why the editor should be permitted to live.

Standing this bright September morning on the steps of the Richelieu, waiting for Major John Plum, the publisher and chief proprietor of *The Fang*, Gaunt felt in fairly good humor with himself. He was conscious of having per-

formed careful and conscientious service for Major Plum's peculiar journal all through this glittering World's Fair season, and although he knew he had gotten himself cordially disliked by his friends in the process, he was now, on the eve of a meeting with his chief, experiencing the self-satisfaction that springs from a consciousness of duty well performed. The Major had announced his coming some days previously, in a telegram, and it was only courteous, perhaps, in his Chicago correspondent to see to it that he was made comfortable during his stay.

Standing there in the sunlight, dreamily watching the hordes of pleasure-seekers streaming across the Illinois Central viaduct, on their way to the Fair grounds, and reveling in the beauty of the sunlight sparkling on the lake, the young man reached the conclusion that life was not without its compensating features. He had been drinking cocktails (a habit that he had acquired during this carnival time and that he enjoyed for its efficacy as an antidote to remorse), and the atmosphere seemed roseate in consequence. He presently felt a light touch on his arm and saw a smartly clad woman standing beside him. There was something about her that was familiar; in fact, he saw that he knew her, though he could not remember where they had met. In the meantime the lady was smiling at him cordially and holding out her hand. He took the hand and returned the smile, diplomatically waiting for her to speak first.

"You don't remember me, I see, Mr. Gaunt," she said pleasantly; "I am Miss Plum."

The grace with which Gaunt could lie was one of his most admirable accomplishments. "Indeed I do remember you, Miss Plum," he averred, with polite insistence, "but you startled me for a moment. You will pardon my saying it, but—you look so much younger—"

He was rewarded with a grateful glance. Whatever spoken reply the lady might have made was prevented by the sudden appearance of Major Plum, who came bowling up the avenue under full sail, panting like an ocean-bound

steamer at her dock and exuding buoyant animalism from every pore. Gaunt remembered him perfectly—no one who once encountered that most amazing personality was ever destined to quite blot it from his memory—and the publisher, the publisher's daughter and the star staff correspondent were soon chatting together on the best of terms.

Now that they had met, the young man remembered distinctly having imbibed a violent aversion to the Major when they had known each other in New York two years before. At that time this military personage had had nothing whatever to do with the management of the paper; but had had, instead, a habit of haunting his brother's office and harassing the editors with childish suggestions on unimportant topics.

Major Plum was a very stout and robust man, whose florid features betokened a long and persistent course of good living. To strangers and servants his manner was pompous and overbearing, but to those who knew him with any degree of intimacy, it was politeness itself. When he was aware that a person knew him and his weaknesses thoroughly, he never attempted to deceive or cozen that person into a belief either in his greatness or his sincerity; it was only with the new and unsophisticated that he was tempted to play tricks. One of his most amusing performances, when he wished to be especially convincing or impressive, was to inflate his chest, gesticulate violently with both arms and expel air from his lungs like a whale, with a loud report that sounded like "Waugh! Waugh! Waugh! Waugh!" The old gentleman was feeling in especially fine fettle this morning, and his "Waugh! Waugh! Waugh!" resembled the pumping of a battery of howitzers. He swiftly ascended the steps of the hotel and grasped Gaunt by the hand.

"Glad to see you, young man, glad to see you!" he ejaculated cordially. "Great morning, eh? And great town, eh?" with a backward jerk of his hand at the human hordes streaming over the viaduct; "even if it is dirtier than the deuce! Waugh! Glad you live here, though, or we

wouldn't get such good paragraphs, eh? Waugh! Waugh! Lord, but it's hot! Let's go take a drink, eh? Waugh! Waugh!! Waugh!!!"

Gaunt excused himself, and the Major, without waiting to renew the invitation, rushed off alone. Miss Plum looked regretful. "Papa is such an impulsive old dear," she explained pleasantly, "he won't wait for anything—not even his whisky. But how beautiful your blue lake is, Mr. Gaunt, and what swarms of people. Why is it, I wonder, that we of the East persist in abusing Chicago?"

"I do not know," confessed the young man politely, "unless it is because you recognize the worthlessness of a town that you decline to enrapture by living in it. Still, I admit I love Chicago. There are worse places."

"Fortunate city, to have such a champion," laughed Miss Plum. "I believe, Mr. Gaunt," she added, "that you would make a true friend."

The young man bowed, and to cloak his embarrassment, engaged in a scrutiny of his very correctly shod feet. His confusion was pleasantly terminated by the appearance of the hotel landlord, yclept by his friends "The Cardinal," and as courtly a gentleman as ever stepped. He knew Gaunt well, and now invited him and his companion to the front window of his office, where, ensconced in two cavernous leather arm-chairs, they could look comfortably out into the sunlit street, with its ever-increasing throngs.

It was a moving picture—one that was new, in a measure, to the people of the bustling western metropolis and that provokes in them, even now, memories closely allied to delight. The crowds were so vast, the enthusiasm so intense, the atmosphere of prosperity, or prodigality, so convincing. When hordes of people, blessed simultaneously with a surplus of money and a frantic desire to spend it, are huddled together in a town fairly hospitable, the spirit of good nature becomes contagious. Everybody seemed to be laughing; work, apparently, was only for paupers and lunatics.

"I am told," announced Miss Plum, "that this is the only

really aristocratic hotel in Chicago—that all the wine-bottles in the cellar have cobwebs on them."

"It's true," admitted the young man gravely; "this is the only hotel in America where you can get your liqueurs with that fine old flavor we read about in books concerning castles on the Rhine and—in Spain."

Glancing at Miss Plum's not wholly unattractive face in profile, Gaunt observed with some surprise that her hair had a suspicion of gray at the temples. It was not unbecoming, but he had not suspected her of an age that whitening locks are supposed to accompany. She noticed the glance and may have read the thought, for she changed color slightly. Her next words, however, showed no indication of annoyance.

"Do you know, Mr. Gaunt," she declared archly, "that when we first met I positively detested you?"

Her companion succeeded in looking pained. "I was not aware of it," he said sadly, "and I must say you managed to conceal your real feelings most generously."

"Then you remember our first meeting?"

"How could one forget?" A politely deprecatory gesture accompanied the question.

"That is very nice of you, of course," acknowledged the publisher's daughter, "but I insist on knowing, Mr. Gaunt, if you are as truthful as you contrive to look. If you remember our first meeting 'perfectly,' tell me about it."

"With pleasure," was the gay reply. "Thus will I establish my claim to truth. The scene is a comfortable mansion in West Fifty-second street, New York. Time, Christmas Eve—more than four years ago. From his solitude in an upper story, a young man, suffering sorely from the complaint known as blue-devils, is summoned by his host. Downstairs he is called upon to meet, and to know, two particularly jolly girls, one of them yourself—" Miss Plum beamed her approval—"and endeavors, ineffectually, I fear, to be entertaining. One of the girls presently sings—so

badly that I am glad it was not you—and the young man feels that he deserves a laurel wreath for not having fits. Now, have I vindicated myself?"

"So far as proving that you remember—yes; but you'll have to admit that you were intensely disagreeable that night. Even my Uncle Everett said so."

"Your Uncle Everett," replied Gaunt, with a slight contraction of the brows, "is a thoroughly good fellow, but if you will permit me to say it, something of a bore as well. Frankly, I was tired, and had asked him not to let me be disturbed that night."

"It was a shame," declared the young lady decisively, "but how was I to know that? As it was, I positively hated you. I never could endure indifference, and you were the most indifferent person I had ever met in my life. I told Uncle Everett afterwards that you might be the cleverest man in the world, but I'd never speak to you any more. And I didn't, did I?"

"No," admitted Gaunt, without undue display of grief, "you did not. But I trust," he added, gently, "that time has modified the ardor of your—must I call it your hate?"

The look that he received convinced him of his skill as a diplomat. Before the young lady could reply, the sound of a prodigious "Waugh-waughing" out in the hallway indicated that the Major was engaging some one in conversation. Gaunt rose and brought him in. The Major had had his refreshment and convinced every one in the hotel, including the barkeepers, of his own importance—a dual condition that never failed to put him in the best humor. But when he spied the two chairs in such close proximity, and realized the length of his absence, the expression of his jolly red face changed. For it was part of this mercurial old chap's scheme of life to simulate a profound and unspeakable ferocity whenever he discovered his daughter alone with a man. The smaller the degree of peril in which the maiden stood by reason of the contact, the more pronounced the ferocity.

"Here! Here! Here!" exclaimed he, the words stampeding from his mouth as though shot out of a gun. "What's this? What's this? Waugh!" Gaunt felt a little alarmed at first, for his venerable friend was waving his arms and beginning to stutter apoplectically. He recovered himself, however, and asked, with great composure, if the Major would like a little more air, in which case he would raise the window. The effect was magical. If he had shown the white feather the old gentleman would have tyrannized over him forever afterwards; as it was, the impudence of his tone secured him his instant respect.

"Now, Ducks," said the fond father, addressing his daughter by a pet name that she afterwards explained to Gaunt had been bestowed upon her by the cadets at West Point, "you run off upstairs while the young man and I take a trot about town. I've a million things to do. Perhaps he'll come back and take a bit of luncheon with us."

To this Gaunt entered a demurrer, explaining that he had an appointment with his wife at one o'clock, and smiled inwardly to think how short a time it was since he had been laughing at his friend Scott for a similar weakness. The valiant Major Plum, however, would hear of no denial. "Yes! yes! Yes, my boy; I'd forgotten you were married," he cried cordially, "but you must bring Mrs. Gaunt, too. I want to see what sort of a wife you've got, eh, you young dog—waugh! Run along now, Ducks."

So "Ducks" dutifully "ran along," sending back over her shoulder a glance meant to be cordial, and the young man walked off down Michigan Avenue with his chief, the latter puffing like a steam-engine, waving his arms like a windmill, and ever and anon splitting the atmosphere and astounding the passers-by with his "Waugh! Waugh! Waugh!"

CHAPTER V

AN EXHIBITION AND A CONTRAST

I do not believe that young Mr. Eustace Gaunt had ever realized how pretty his wife was until he saw her seated at a table opposite to Agnes Plum. In obedience to the valiant Major's request, he had telegraphed her to come down to the hotel, and he was flattered by the manifest sincerity of the old gentleman's admiration.

As a matter of fact, this fine old warrior's manner towards all femininity was one of infinite chivalry and magnificence. It was his custom, on meeting a woman for the first time, to bow as profoundly as the tension of his waistband would permit, and, catching one of her hands in his right, stroke it gently with his left, while expressing to her the ecstasy it afforded him to merely look into her eyes. Later, when telling her the story of his life, the ardor of his demonstrations was regulated, decently and in order, by the favor with which they were received by the lady. In this case, so deeply was he impressed by his Chicago correspondent's wife, and so devout were his attentions to that demure little woman, that the husband wondered more than once how much farther he ought to permit them to proceed without at least demanding an increase in salary.

Mrs. Gaunt had been shopping, and the agreeable little excitement of a luncheon at her favorite restaurant in the company of friends of her husband whom she had never met had lent an added sparkle to her always brilliant eyes and a delicious tinge of pink to her smooth young cheeks. Her smile, too, was incessant and infectious. In such moments, when Gaunt looked at her, he marveled at her capacity for endurance of his moods; and then, so elastic is the reasoning power of the average imbecile of his stripe, he was wont

to reflect, comfortably, that his conduct could not, after all, be so very reprehensible, else she could hardly recover from its effects so easily.

From his wife's face, as she turned to chatter amiably and brightly with the Major, Gaunt's glance fell upon that of the Major's daughter. The gaze of these two met for an instant, and in that instant, ridiculous as it may seem, there shot through the young man's mind the shadowy foreboding of a grim and nameless grief. The feeling was momentary and was forgotten almost as quickly as experienced. From marking the contrast in form and feature presented by the two women—his wife, with her fresh young beauty, and the Major's daughter, whose lesser fortune in that regard was partially atoned for by a certain elegance of dress—Gaunt felt himself called to the study of two miracles—Miss Plum's endorsement of the cocktail custom and her father's preparations for his repast.

A cocktail as an incentive to appetite is no novelty to men, but when so employed and enjoyed by a lady of degree from the East, occasioned *The Fang's* Chicago correspondent some surprise. This emotion, however, was inconsequential when compared with the awe and amazement that beset him when called upon to witness the feat in food-annihilation performed by the Major.

A feat of this kind was so common a one with this large-hearted and wonderful man, and it became to Gaunt, in after years, so vast and intolerable a nightmare, that it deserves detailed description if only as one of the marvels of World's Fair times that failed to achieve exploitation by the newspapers. Major Plum of New York, then, the epicure and host, having seen to it that his sauterne was cool, his burgundy warm and the conversation general and spirited over the clams and the fish, helped his three guests to a fair share of some venison chops from a chafing-dish and then slowly and with the utmost deliberation proceeded to the business of his own luncheon.

By some sort of tacit understanding, the old warrior

ceased to be a factor in the conversation at this time. He himself forbore to so much as compliment Mrs. Gaunt, but fixed his attention, instead, on the more interesting face of his platter. Gaunt and the two ladies maintained a decent counterfeit of conversation, but the young man watched the performance of the old one out of the corner of his eye, fascinated, as the fawn of the forest is fascinated by the spectacle of the boa constrictor swallowing an elephant.

Carefully stacking three large and juicy chops in the center of his plate in a smoking and savory pyramid, the Major tucked the upper extremity of his napkin more firmly into his collar, eyed the pyramid with tenderness and affection and softly ejaculated, "Ah-h-h! Waugh!" Then, with a dessert-spoon, he extracted from their brown jackets the interiors of three large baked potatoes and proceeded to build about the chops a mealy white wall, which he stuccoed with peas and mortared with butter and sauce from his chafing-dish. A powdering of salt and cayenne pepper in judicious quantities and the fortress was ready for the assault.

Before commencing this, the Major gazed for one instant, raptly as an idolater at the moment of the sacrifice, at Cardinal Bemis' hand-painted ceiling. His companions were forgotten. Even Mrs. Gaunt, in that moment of divine ecstasy, failed to catch his eye. His daughter might have been in Seringapatam or Kamchatka for aught he cared. And then—

Why, then the assault, the deluge, the demolition! With a resounding and truculent "Ah! Waugh!" the hero of a hundred battles (with beefsteaks) fell upon the fort of his own erection. Down came potato battlements and domed mortises of meat! And out of sight they went, to the music of churning jaws and the artillery of many mumbled "Ah-Waughs!" When it was all over, and the conquest complete, the victor in the one-sided conflict leaned back in his chair, and sighed deeply two or three times. Only for an instant, though. Erect in his chair the next moment, he

took a brave draught of burgundy, smiled benignly upon his daughter and informed Mrs. Gaunt that hers was the complexion of a goddess.

"So glad you've come back to earth, papa, dear," said Miss Plum pleasantly, "suppose we have some coffee now; after that Mrs. Gaunt and I want to go upstairs for a chat."

Gaunt heard the remark in a state of daze. He could not get over the Major's demolition of that fortress. His wife, to tell the truth, did not look over-pleased at the prospect of the "chat." He was not surprised to hear her suggest that he wait for them. "Perhaps," she said gently, glancing timidly at her husband, "Eustace and I could entertain you a little, Miss Plum, if your father must leave us. He can make himself happy with his cigar down here. Afterwards, suppose we all go to the Fair together?"

Miss Plum looked radiant. Gaunt glanced in her direction and instantly realized that there were some burdens in this world too grevious to be borne. He made up his mind that he could not endure an afternoon spent in such a way, but managed to avoid his wife's eyes as he suggested that a decision on her proposal could be reached later. What the "chat" was to be about he of course had no earthly idea; but he felt gratified to the Major's daughter for affording him a chance to be alone. The Major, he knew by experience, always slept from thirty to sixty minutes after absorbing a meal, whether his place of repose were a bed or a mere chair in a café; so that he stood in no peril of boredom from that quarter. His wife gave him a rather wistful smile as she passed him on her way to the elevator in company with Miss Plum, and when the Major had excused himself with a grunt or two and disappeared in the direction of the basement he sought a seat by the window, and his own reflections.

His chief sensation, as he sank into the chair's comfortable embrace, was a large and beautiful pride in the sense of his own virtue. With the impression of his wife's beauty and goodness strong upon him and the stimulating aroma

of the Major's burgundy still fluttering about his nostrils, he had been congratulating himself for an hour past on the fact that he had said good-by to Imogen Leal the day before —in all probability forever. She was going home in a few days, to nurse a sick sister, so she had told him, and had agreed that it was wisest they should not meet again. For in his calm and rational moods Gaunt was a man not altogether devoid of sense. It was only when under the influence of strong excitement that, in matters of vital import, he manifested his indifference to consequences.

But, while he had reached the very wise conclusion that a further surrender to his passion would be suicidal, he had by no means recovered from its effects. The future seemed painful, but his memories were sweet. Thus it was that the opportunity to dream, if only for ten minutes, partook of the qualities of a benediction, and he had not enjoyed his solitude more than two minutes before he became aware that he would be quite miserable if he did not secure it for the rest of the afternoon.

And with this thought there came to him another. He remembered that there even now reposed, in the breast pocket of his coat, a certain very diminutive pair of lavender gloves—feminine gloves. He had carried them away with him on the occasion of this very circumspect and desirable farewell, and it was necessary that they should be returned to their owner. He remembered, also, that queer little Mrs. St. Judas was employed during the day in one of the World's Fair buildings near the Lake, as a sort of show-woman or addition to the exhibits; he could never determine which. It flashed across him that the surest way to secure the return of Miss Leal's gloves was to carry them to her sister. He could not for the life of him have explained the feeling, but it seemed to him at that moment as though proximity to the little Judas woman would be, in one sense, a reminder of Imogen, and therefore pleasant.

When the ladies returned he was brutally diplomatic. He knew that his wife had a couple of errands to perform, and

he waited until she had announced her intention of starting upon them before declaring regretfully that he really could not wait, as he had an important engagement with a man at the Administration Building at five o'clock. It was then almost four, and the whaleback steamer was about starting from her pier; he thought he would go that way, if they would excuse him. They assented readily enough, of course, and the deceiver, bowing with great grace, went his way without noticing that his wife, at the moment of his departure, turned her head aside, in order, possibly, to conceal from Miss Plum the moisture that had sprung to her eyes, and the pathetic quiver of the lower lip.

The Major, happily, was still invisible.

CHAPTER VI

THE CRIME OF A PAIR OF GLOVES

No thought of the selfishness of his behavior entered the mind of Gaunt as he stepped upon the boat. Perhaps there is no form of selfishness so marked, and at the same time so difficult of comprehension by the man guilty of it, as the desire to be alone at times when his society is desired by others. The young man had not yet reached the point where he could discriminate closely between selfishness and virtue, and notwithstanding the fact that his soul was yearning for solitude, he even felt that he was performing a meritorious act in avoiding his wife's presence at a time when he could not take his thoughts from some one else.

Curiously enough, too, he was inclined to applaud himself most vigorously for the step he was now taking. In the pair of delicately scented gloves lying in that inner pocket lay his only possible excuse for holding further communion with the blue-eyed siren of his vagrant dreams. True, he could have sent Imogen Leal her gloves in a variety of

ways, but the idea of the mail or messenger service had never entered his mind. He had bidden her good-by, but the return of the gloves would have served him as an excuse, had he chosen to avail himself of it, to call and repeat the farewell this afternoon. So profound was his repentance for his misdeeds—a repentance that had seemed more poignant and convincing since he had seen his wife looking so adorably pretty this morning—that he resolved not to do this. He would instead take the gloves to her sister; and in reaching this decision he felt that he could approve his own conduct deliberately, and with justice. It was not until the steamer had backed from her dock and headed up the Lake that he began to appreciate the picturesque pretense of his reasoning. As a matter of absolute fact, his infatuation was so supreme that the next dearest thing to seeing its object was the sight of one to whom the object was near and dear. Perhaps, however, his fixed determination to avoid Delilah herself entitled him to a certain amount of credit.

Seated in a comfortable deck chair, with his hat tilted forward over his eyes and the smoke from a cinnamon-tinted perfecto curling fragrantly from his mouth, Gaunt marked the glint of the sun on the blue water, and decided that the world was a pleasant place. Even at this distance he could see the figures of his wife and Miss Plum standing together on the steps of the Richelieu. The former had her hands in the pockets of her jaunty jacket and the watcher caught himself wishing that she would wave a handkerchief to him; but even that wish failed to impress him with a sense of the flippancy of his present errand. Presently the two figures descended the steps and became merged in the throng on the sidewalk and the idler on the flying steamer felt disappointed. Long years afterward he remembered that moment and the emotions that it awakened.

The brightness of the sky, the purity of the air, the musical churning of the waters by the propeller of the steamer, were opposed to seriousness of thought, and the truant's spirits rose as the sweeping stretch of the white Peristyle stole

into view. Now that he had no one to entertain but himself he was almost happy and he walked ashore registering a resolution to get his interview with Mrs. St. Judas over as soon as possible and spend the rest of the afternoon in the Art Building, where he could dream in peace and at his leisure.

It was a perfect day—for there are perfect days in Chicago in the early autumn, believe me! The cool breeze from the Lake produced a delightfully crisp temperature along its bank, and as Gaunt sauntered on shore and mingled with the crowd moving slowly in the direction of the Forestry Building, he wondered how it would be possible to live in the neighborhood after this wondrous panorama of the Fair had passed away.

When within a few feet of the little corner in which he knew he should find Mrs. St. Judas, he suddenly drew back. It was a poltroon thought, but for an instant he felt tempted to flee, and take the gloves to the sister instead. It was all very silly. Had he really craved the boon of another farewell with Imogen, he would not have needed these wretched gloves as an excuse; but Gaunt was a man who believed in doing things gracefully when possible, and to have sought the young woman again would have seemed to him rather ridiculous, especially as he had agreed with her last night, with great dramatic fervor and all belief in his own sincerity, that it was best they should not meet again. So he flicked a speck of dust from his coat-sleeve with the light cane that he carried and walked straight and unerringly to the little corner. There he beheld—

Coils of inky-black hair, surmounted by a spruce straw hat. A delicate neck, merging into a straight and shapely back, which, clad in some fleecy blue fabric, tapered gracefully away into a slender waist, where began a fetching white duck skirt—all the charming things, in fact, that he had come hither expressly to avoid. For the ebony hair and the delicate neck and the slender waist, and all the rest, belonged to Imogen Leal, and when she turned and flashed

the nun-like eyes at him, Gaunt's heart gave a great leap, and the very hyacinths in his button-hole shook, in the excess of his emotion.

The girl looked both surprised and pleased. She was seated at an odd little desk and spun her swivel-chair around in order to face her visitor more fully. Her eyes were dancing with mischief, but she veiled them demurely with the white lids as she remarked gently, "I—I thought we had said good-by."

Gaunt came forward rather shamefacedly and tossed the lavender gloves on the desk. She pounced upon them with a little cry of rapture, exclaiming, "You good boy! How very thoughtful of you."

"I had supposed," said the Sinner, stupidly, "that I should find your sister here and that she wouldn't mind taking them to you." He was watching the succession of delicious rose-and-cream tints that were pursuing each other over the girl's cheeks and throat, and the sight was so bewildering that he had little knowledge of what he said.

"Then," she asked mercilessly, with one of the shy, upward glances that always made him think of perishing saints, "you are not glad to see me?"

Gaunt laughed nervously. He dropped into a cane chair near by and brushed away the beads of perspiration that stood on his brow. Now that he had met his siren, as it seemed to him, through the direct intervention of Fate, and without the shadow of design on his part, he was inclined more than ever to applaud himself for the commendable resolution that had brought him hither. If he had yielded to temptation and taken these fateful gloves where he had believed Imogen to be, he would have missed her. In very truth, here was a case in which virtue was its own reward. His elation was so great that he was afraid to speak for fear of revealing it.

"You should never ask me such questions as that," he said at length, very softly, "they make me think that you doubt me. I came here expecting to see your sister. I in-

tended to give her your gloves and escape in ten seconds —you know Harriet and I are not passionately fond of each other—but now that I've found you, I'm going to stay. Do you mind?"

She glanced at him brightly and ran her sweet little chromatic scale of a laugh. "Mind!" she exclaimed, mellowly, "why, you dear man, I'm going to make you walk all the way across the grounds and down the Midway with me and then home after that. Hattie was out of sorts this morning and asked me to come here in her place. It's half-past four now, and I'm free. Let us go."

She glanced into a little mirror above the desk and gave an approving pat to the glossy black locks above either ear. Gaunt was charmed by her sprightliness and vivacity, though a trifle disappointed to find her in so gay a mood. It would have been more to his liking if the shadow of their approaching separation had been discernible in her face. He, of course, was in no position to know that his lack of desire to let her go without another farewell was largely responsible for her high spirits. Your thoroughly virtuous woman is never quite so happy as when satisfied that her charms have been instrumental in wrecking a virtuous resolution.

They walked together, side by side, out into the brilliant sunshine and along by the blue waters of the lagoon. Providence may, in its time, have permitted mankind to view more beautiful sights than that blue lagoon, in its setting of glittering white shores, but the mind just now fails to recall them. As he remembered having done on a former occasion, Gaunt watched his companion moving beside him, with long, graceful strides, and felt himself exulting, almost against his will, in the sense of the power that she wielded over him. She was in a mood somewhat unusual for her—a mood that caused her to prattle prettily, like a clever child that knows its prattle is being appreciated, upon a variety of light and unimportant topics. Then she grew more serious. She discussed the affairs of the Exhibition, criticised cer-

tain features of its management, prophesied changes, debated possibilities, considered effects. Her words flowed on, incessantly, musically; and Gaunt listened with a lazy satisfaction at his heart, tempered with a keen regret that on the morrow it must all end. I had almost forgotten to say that he now had no especial yearning for solitude.

The crowd in attendance at the Fair on this particular day was not large, and the Administration Plaza, when they reached it, was but sparsely peopled. In front of the building, at the western end of the Lagoon, were some benches, and upon one of these they seated themselves, both becoming silent, by tacit consent, in the presence of a spectacle almost holy in its beauty.

In after years the man remembered every detail of that solemn, tremendous picture: the brilliant white of the buildings to the north and south cutting the sky-line sharply, and the towering pillars of the Peristyle forming a frame for the dimpling fresh-water sea beyond; the glint of plashing fountains, and at the eastern end of the Lagoon, majestic and splendid and beautiful, the great gold statue of Liberty, uplifting her sceptre in a dumb appeal to the multitude to appreciate and reverence an architectural marvel so soon to pass away.

Imogen Leal stealthily slipped her hand into Gaunt's. Her mood of sprightliness had quite vanished, and glancing into her eyes, he detected a suspicion of tears in them. A choking sensation rose in his throat. Silently he pressed the slim hand, as it lay in his own, wondering at the sensation of sorrow that had stolen upon them both.

The girl spoke first. "It is so very beautiful," she whispered. "It always makes me feel as if I were in church."

The man did not answer. He was thinking of the ludicrous condition of his own soul and the impossibility of his ever comprehending it. He felt that he would gladly join any church and pay pew-rent in it for life, if it would teach him how to maintain his at present entirely innocent rela-

tions with this beautiful character, and at the same time preserve his fidelity to his wife.

"Do you know," she went on, still in a musical half-whisper, "that I am one of those unlucky people who have not long to live, and when I look at a scene as beautiful as this, I do not seem to care."

A quick pain shot to Gaunt's heart. He looked squarely into her eyes now and saw the tears gathering in them. "What do you mean?" he asked anxiously.

"Oh, don't be alarmed, dear," she answered, with ready assurance, "I'm not going to die suddenly, or anything horrid, like that — at least, I hope not. But there's something the matter with my heart, you know. I take electric shocks for it, and all that sort of thing, when I'm at home. The doctor says I may live for years—but not for many. There's no reason why I should feel sorry, though. People die every day, don't they? And here I am, seemingly very healthy and comfortable, keenly enjoying the most superb sight in all the world. I suppose I ought not to complain — only, I have been so happy with you that I do not want to die at all."

She leaned forward slightly, and passed her hand across her eyes. A spasm of utter horror went through her companion's soul as he watched her. The idea of this gentle creature dying—passing away from the earth—becoming dust, nothing! — the mere suggestion sickened and appalled him. He turned and looked again into the girl's face. She was smiling into his eyes — a grave, sad, brave smile, that told him she was speaking the truth. He shuddered and grew white, but turned and looked again. After all, it seemed unreasonable. She looked strong, healthy, ardent. Upon that exquisite face there lay no shadow of approaching doom. He mastered the sinking at his heart and managed to stammer out, awkwardly and brokenly, an opinion to the effect that doctors were frequently mistaken in such matters.

The girl saw the distress in his face and it touched her. "Forgive me, dear," she said softly, stretching out both her

hands, "I ought not to have spoken of it. It was foolish of me. Besides, how ridiculous it all is. Any of us may die at any moment. And I, as I have said, may live for years — oh, hush! Listen!"

Solemnly, mournfully, like a requiem, the strains of Chopin's Funeral March came floating to them across the Plaza. The band was a good one, and on the soft afternoon air the plaintive harmonies rose and swelled with a pathos beyond belief. And when, after the sweeping succession of passionate minor chords, the thin thread of haunting melody came trembling from the clarionets, a superstitious awe fell upon the man, as he sat there watching the girl, in the slowly gathering twilight. There was a rapt gleam in her eyes — the enthusiasm of a soul that is pampered and satisfied — and Gaunt, watching her, could hardly have told himself whether he rejoiced or mourned. In this contact with her—in their dual reverence for the beauty of the scene and the sensuous delight of the music, there was a happiness profound and intense; in the terrible truth she had just told him, there was the ecstasy of a limitless grief. Looking about him, he saw the buildings and the fountains and the people through a mist. He felt almost like a criminal, for having been made the sharer of a secret so forlorn.

The Funeral March sighed itself into silence, and there arose in its place a chorus of school-children, chanting an evening hymn. Their fresh young voices rang out with a surpassing sweetness that harmonized with the time and the place:

> Abide with me! Fast falls the eventide:
> The darkness deepens. Lord, with me abide.

For an instant Gaunt felt almost religious. The scene and the hymn carried him back to the sweet green days of his boyhood, when he had stood with his sisters in a far-away village church and lifted his young treble with the rest. At that eventful moment, and for no reason that he could have readily explained or analyzed, he worshiped

the pure-faced girl at his side after the fashion in which idolaters worship their images of brass. She, looking into his eyes, saw the passion of reverence there, and was satisfied. In any form of religious fervor, the senses are to a certain extent operative. That, possibly, was the reason why the influence of the hymn, sweetly sung by childish voices, drew these two sinners more closely together.

Then this music also ceased, and the children, released from restraint by their teachers, came pattering and chattering down the doorsteps and went streaming in all directions. "Now," said Imogen Leal, resolutely, with a firm compression of her sweetly curving lips, "I have made up my mind to one thing, and that is that there shall be no more sadness, sir, to-day. I have caused some of it, I am sorry to say, and it must end now. I forbid you to remember one single silly thing that I have said. I have a low taste for —forgive me!—for beer. Eustace, take me where I can get some Bavarian beer."

Her change of mood was infectious. With youth in the scale and love in the atmosphere, sorrow can never last long, and even the doleful tidings he had just heard failed to affect Gaunt to the extent of making him forget his present good fortune. Miss Leal rose and swished her skirts into place with a dexterous movement. Then she pointed with her dainty blue parasol towards the entrance of the Midway, commanding, "Come, sirrah!"

Her escort secured her permission to light a cigar and sauntered with her down the pathway in the direction that she had indicated. The idlest of moods was upon him. The girl's revelation concerning the condition of her health had produced in him a certain recklessness—a feeling that nothing mattered—and his determination to profit by this hour, if he never secured another like it, became established and fixed. He was inclined to laugh at himself as he reflected on the idiocy of it all. As they progressed he met many people that he knew, both men and women, some of whom glanced with no little curiosity at the tall girl pacing the

graveled walk gracefully at his side. Not that there was anything extraordinary, or even surprising, in the circumstance; for to be seen with your own wife in World's Fair times only afforded proof that you could secure no more congenial company.

In that slow, lazy walk the two forgot everything except the remoteness of any possibility of their meeting again. Their enjoyment was so keen as to be almost hysterical. Their conversation was frothy, flippant, and their behavior that of a pair of children released from confinement in school after hours. The grave-eyed maid who a short time before had discoursed with becoming solemnity on the subject of her prospective early death made coquettish glances at her escort as she chaffed him on the height and stiffness of his collar; and Gaunt, seasoned man of thirty and father of a robust male child, made furtive snatches at the hand nearest him as they walked along, pressing the slim fingers foolishly when they suffered a capture their owner did not strongly endeavor to avert. O, precious idiocy of imaginary love! Is there any other influence quite as exhilarating, or one for which the price is half so dear?

The pair passed down through the broad walks, brilliant on either side with green turf and flowering plants, and so on into that racketing, clattering vortex of heterogeneous humanity that men called the Midway Plaisance. The memories of its marvels and its oddities are strong upon some of us yet, I fancy, but it is not my purpose to attempt to depict any of them here. The World's Fair was mighty in its mysteries of accomplishment, staggering in some of its immediate effects. Memories of the Midway will do to cherish occasionally, like the memory of some fantastic dream. It was in a dream that Eustace Gaunt walked down it on that bright September afternoon—a dream that subsequently assumed all the proportions, as well as the unnerving qualities, of a nightmare. As he sauntered along, the expiring sun dazzled his eyes and flushed his face, even as the laughing glances of Imogen Leal warmed his heart

and quickened his brain. The farther he proceeded, the keener grew his self-satisfaction and the profounder his conviction that days like this were created solely for his own enjoyment. His good nature with himself and his surroundings was deep and comprehensive. He laughed persistently at sights that were not funny and scattered coins with a prodigal hand among the little brown heathen babies that sprawled in the dust at the side of the roadway. His companion viewed his eccentricities of behavior with a tolerant eye. The woman does not live who has not a compassionate spot in her soul for the dolt she is driving daft.

At the entrance to the queer region known as Cairo Street Gaunt paused. He began to realize that their journey was ending much too quickly to suit him and he suggested that they enter. In five minutes he felt inclined to regret that they had done so.

At the end of the quaint little street, where three or four kneeling camels were surrounded by a laughing crowd of men, women and children, he beheld a sight that caused him to draw his companion hurriedly into one of the little booths, where, from behind a pillar, they could watch without being observed themselves. He would have sought escape at once if he had thought it could be accomplished, but deemed it wiser to wait. A whispered word to his accomplice in hiding caused her to remain where she was without murmuring.

His wife was standing in the center of the narrow street, her pretty head thrown back and her white teeth showing in a demure smile at the expense of Miss Agnes Plum. That smartly clad lady was, to tell the exact truth, looking a trifle uncomfortable. She was seated on the back of a camel, and the animal, under stress of grievous thumps and prods from his driver, was in the act of rising to his feet. Any one who has ever seen a novice in the gentle art of camel-riding endeavoring to maintain a posture of ease and grace at such a moment is aware of the height and depth of the failure likely to be encountered. The beast's first

move being to plant his hind feet in the pave and elevate his rump to a preposterous height, the victim between the humps is infallibly shot forward upon his neck; and, by the same rule, when the action is reversed by the animal's straightening of his long forelegs, the passenger's spine and neck are frequently dislocated by the prodigious backward heave. Miss Plum's appearance and conduct during this ordeal were not such as to promote gravity among the spectators. A red stocking and high-buttoned boot that projected to larboard of the "ship of the desert" suggested a lack of physical control, and her shrieks of laughter and timidity drowned the quadruped's groans for mercy. It was a tableau vibrant with life and would have been vastly entertaining to Gaunt in the absence of possibilities that rendered his further stay in the neighborhood injudicious.

It was a strange trick of Fate that had brought him there. The queerness of the encounter amused him, long afterwards—this sudden bringing almost within touching distance of one another of these three women who were to play such conspicuous parts in the moulding of his life. Even in that moment he had time to note the wholesome beauty of his wife. She wore a neat, girlish hat and her daintily shod feet twinkled prettily beneath her dark skirt as she paced away, presently, beside the camel, which lumbered dutifully off as though conscious of the importance of the burden he was bearing. The usual rabble of men and urchins followed, shouting sarcastic words of encouragement to the swarthy Arab who wielded the goad.

Gaunt turned to look at his companion and saw that she had turned white. His own brow was covered with beads of perspiration, though there was no reason for his nervousness, save, maybe, that of his possession of a conscience. Had he chosen to have intercepted his wife and presented Imogen Leal to her, she would have thought little of the circumstance. It was too late for that now, and he was glad of it. He felt that he would not have been equal to

so trying an exhibition in the gentle art of deception as such a proceeding would have entailed.

As his wife's figure disappeared around the corner he noticed the glance that Miss Leal sent after it, and it disturbed him. For an instant there came into her white face the same expression of menace that had startled him on the night of their meeting in "Old Vienna." But it was gone like a flash—just as soon as she saw that he noticed it, in fact—and there stole into the blue eyes a light of tenderness, of mystification.

"So that was your wife?" she sighed, gently.

"Yes," assented the Sinner, with an intonation half of defiance, half of remorse and reverence.

"She is very, very pretty," said Imogen Leal, "and she looks," she added softly, "so good."

"She is both good and pretty," acquiesced Gaunt. The statement seemed lame and trite, so he supplemented it with — "far too good for a selfish brute like me."

"You are anything but that," smiled his companion blithely; and what man, similarly situated, would have declined to credit testimony so convincing? The Dreamer looked, long and studiously, into those deep turquoise eyes once more and forgot everything — even the shabbiness of his conduct in permitting his wife to entertain Miss Plum at the Fair alone.

He was recalled with great suddenness to the consideration of practical things. "When," asked the young lady, pouting in a provoking fashion, "am I to have my Bavarian beer?"

"In five minutes," responded her escort, cheerfully. He was grateful for the turn given by the question to the trend of his thoughts. "We will go over to Vienna," he said, "your craving for the brew of Munich shall be satisfied forthwith."

He felt virtually certain that he would not encounter his wife and Miss Plum again, because it was nearly six o'clock,

and he remembered, with another odd spasm of remorse, that he had never known his little boy's mother to permit him to dine alone. She was probably on her way home by this time.

* * * * * *

She had yielded, without any very stubborn resistance, to his urging and had remained to dine with him in the quaint resort that Chicago people learned to love in the year of Grace, 1893, and in which the foundations were laid for so many weird domestic comedies. A handful of peas tossed skyward in "Old Vienna" in those merry times would have fallen upon as many candidates for the divorce court as there were peas in the handful.

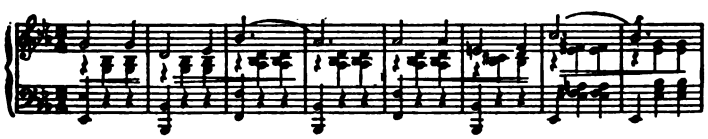
A woman who shares a meal with a man in a public place surrenders a certain amount of her dignity; that is to say, her doing so suggests a degree of intimacy that may or may not be borne out by the circumstances, and that in the latter case her companion is sure to find charming. It affords him a sense of possession. Gaunt, who had drank more wine than was usual with him, was conscious of this feeling and it tightened the tension of his nerves and enhanced his enjoyment of the situation. He had remarked the daintiness of his fair guest's manner of consuming the delicacies set before her, and the pretty air of solicitation with which she had insisted on his devouring his share had amused and captivated him. His feeling of recklessness was growing. The longer he remained in this rather remarkable girl's company, the deeper grew his infatuation. Under the stimulation of the wine that he had drunk, and of his memories, that infatuation began to lose some of its apparent danger and folly. The poetry that lay in its very hopelessness appealed to him. He looked at Imogen Leal across the table through the film of pale blue smoke from his cigarette and saw the great eyes shining into his and the red mouth temptingly a-tremble. He did not know whether to deplore his folly or to laugh at it. All he knew, or cared to know for the moment, was that he found it sweet.

And the stars came peeping out, coquettishly, one by one, and a languid, consumptive strip of moon, too, that cast a pure light down on a scene of merry-making as picturesque as it was ephemeral and strange. The time had flown fast, and gay parties of smartly clad women and weary-looking men were grouped about the white tables, eating and drinking and making the night mellow with jollity and mirth. The colored lights glittered from the frowning gray walls and the music of that fine Austrian band sighed and trembled on the calm air of the night like the whispers of wood-nymphs from another world. It was a mimic fairyland, an incident of a roseate carnival-time that with some of us is unforgotten yet. And as Gaunt sat there, consuming more wine—for a great thirst was upon him and the Liebfraumilch tasted like nectar in his mood of elation and abandon — the events of the last few weeks went through his brain with a rush and he felt himself being carried away, he knew not and cared not whither, on a wave of impossible, unrighteous fancy. If any one had asked him that morning, as he had left his house with the kiss of his child on his cheek, if he loved Imogen Leal, he would have clenched his teeth tightly, bowed to the proprieties and answered—No! Asking himself the same question now, confronted fairly with the wondrous spell of the girl's beauty of body and of mind, with the blood surging to his heart and all the fantastic imagery of his dreams floating through his brain, the answer was different. There was still no thought of disloyalty to his wife in his heart; but in the madness of the moment, looking into Imogen's eyes, and perceiving, as he thought, the holiness of an infinite adoration and trust therein, he swore an oath to himself, under his breath, that he could die for her. The thought brought him a thrill of exhilaration. This, he reflected, was the Love of story and of romance, the Love that led to mighty deeds, that inspired self-immolation, that commanded sacrifice. The girl's grim revelation of her physical peril had gone from his mind. He remembered only that they two were beloved of one another

and that after to-night they might not meet again. He shivered a little, though the night was warm, and drank more wine.

The girl had been watching him gravely. Her eyes drooped before the persistent interrogation of his gaze. She shyly extended a hand across the table and touched one of his with it, whispering, "Our last night—do you love me?"

Gaunt's fingers closed over her slim, white ones. His lips were dumb but his eyes were eloquent. The gentlest of breezes fanned their brows and the fickle crescent moon, ascending higher into the heavens, looked bland and serene, if a trifle shocked. And just then the man with the silver cornet began to croon out his nightly waltz-lullaby:



The air was played through to the end, and it sounded mournful enough, though the people about them were laughing and chattering, some of them too loudly for good taste. It seemed to both Gaunt and his companion that the revellers and the lights and the music were part of a dream, and that they themselves were far away, in a little world all their own. When they rose to leave the place it dawned upon them that neither had spoken a dozen words in the last hour, but neither saw fit to remark upon the circumstance.

Gaunt telephoned for a cab, and purposely loitering by the way, they arrived at the gates of the grounds just in time to meet it. Following closely upon the young man's mood of elation came one of comparative despondency and gloom. Liebfraumilch is a heavenly wine, but it is not lasting in its effect.

When they reached the door it was quite late. Gaunt dismissed his cab, preferring to walk the rest of the way to his

home. They stood for a moment in the hallway. The moonlit street was quite deserted.

The woman faced the man, looking into his eyes. Her dark, straight brows slightly contracted themselves, and her words were barely audible. "Once more," she murmured, "say it once more, O, my beloved. I am going away, you know. Remember what I told you—*about my heart.*"

Gaunt straightened himself up stiffly, like a soldier in the act of receiving a wound that he anticipates but cannot avert. Horror at the suggested calamity again possessed him. He seemed fascinated, transfixed. "I will love you," he said, slowly and painfully, like a dull child reciting a lesson, "as long as I live."

As he spoke the words, he believed them.

He kissed her, reverently, on the forehead, and went away hurriedly.

The lavender gloves had a good deal to answer for.

CHAPTER VII

CONTRAPUNTAL EFFECTS

Gaunt dawdled into his office next morning at his usual hour—ten-thirty or thereabouts—and was not surprised to find two of his friends there, waiting for him. The atmosphere of dreamful indolence that prevailed in that office for three parts of the day proved tempting to a coterie of ornamental young men who admired, or pretended to admire, the writer for his talents, and helped him to spend his time agreeably. Such young men liked to sit in his office and smoke cigarettes and talk politics and admire his stenographer.

"Look at him," jeered Romney, a youth of some elegance, though great slimness, of figure, and possessed of a deep

bass voice with which he was wont to roar, at stag parties, like an escaped bull, "look at him, all in white. Isn't he a dream?"

"Clean as a spanked baby," asserted Harry Haverstraw, a gilded butterfly who climaxed a career of glowing absurdity in World's Fair times by dying a few years afterwards, fashionably, of appendicitis, in Paris; "what a pity the soiled soul is so black within."

"The heathen are jocose this morning," sighed Gaunt, glancing at the pile of letters that lay on his desk. "I had flattered myself these flannels were rather becoming. Bob," —this to Romney—"that off eye of yours has a nervous cast in it; absinthe will fetch you yet. Harry, if you'll pardon my saying it, your own clothes appear none too smooth. They seem to have been slept in. You look as if you had been out all night, and I think I could wager that you have and not lose my money. I fancy, moreover—"

He caught sight of a telegram lying beside the heap of letters and paused long enough to tear open the envelope. His face changed color as he read:

> I leave at eleven instead of five. Meet me Lake Shore station.
>
> IMOGEN.

The young man glanced at his watch and handed some money to his stenographer. "Julia," he said briskly, "go over to State Street and get me a box of roses. Hurry; because you must have them here in fifteen minutes."

"There he goes," jeered Romney, as the damsel vanished, "there he goes, blithe boy that he is. Telegrams and romance,—roses and ruin,—petticoats and woe! Who's the charmer this time, Eustace? Is she young or old, black or white, poor but honest, or a dame of high degree? Speak up, you dog, and make your confession."

"I'll bet my bull-terrier," announced Haverstraw, gravely, elevating his handsome legs to a more comfortable position on a square table in the centre of the room, "that it's not a girl at all. He's going to take the flowers to some hospital."

This delicate satire brought a good-natured roar from Romney, and the happy pair began matching coins to determine which of them should defray the cost of the refreshment that custom and the near approach of eleven o'clock rendered indispensable. At another time, maybe, Gaunt would have found their antics amusing. Just now they irritated him. He fumbled over his letters, scanned one or two hurriedly, and then jumped to his feet, remarking, "You'll have to excuse me now, boys. I'll be back in an hour."

"Not by a great deal," declared Romney, blocking the doorway with his graceful but attenuated frame; "tell us where you're going, first."

His friend broke through with some violence and gained the elevator without further molestation. The two good-looking scapegraces, perceiving him to be in earnest, forbore to follow him and he waited in the street, in front of the building, for the girl he had sent on his errand. When she arrived, panting and out of breath, he found he still had twenty minutes, so he stopped on the way to the station to buy some books for the traveler.

He found Imogen easily enough. In her pale-pink shirtwaist and white straw hat, she looked the only cool object in the stifling Pullman car. Her sister was with her.

The latter rose as Gaunt entered the car. He had seen little of her of late, and he noticed that she looked pale and ill. He was hot and flurried after his quick walk in the broiling sun, but he managed to present the books and flowers with something like grace and to utter a greeting just as calmly as if his collar were still behaving rationally instead of melting into a noose at the back of his neck.

Imogen opened the box with trembling fingers and gave one of the dewy red roses to her sister. Another she pinned in Gaunt's coat. Her mouth was quivering and her eyes downcast. She seemed on the verge of tears. "Old girl," exclaimed Mrs. St. Judas suddenly, after eyeing her curiously for a moment or so, "I believe I'll run away now. I have an appointment, you know, and—well, good-by. Be

sure and wire me how Gertrude is. Good-by, dear. Mr. Gaunt, I'll see you again, of course."

And in a moment she was gone. The two Sinners were alone, with but two short minutes betwixt them and—Desolation.

"My little sister is desperately ill," exclaimed Imogen hastily, "we had a telegram this morning. That is why I am hurrying so. Oh, . . . *dear!* . . . " The thin, quavering little voice choked wretchedly and the blue eyes swam.

"I can't let you go," said the man suddenly; "yes, I must. But I will come to see you soon. May I?"

"Yes," she answered gravely, her eyes gleaming through the tears like discs of molten sapphire; "yes, you must come; and I shall wait for you down there by the sea. You are sure, quite sure, you will come?"

The men on the platform were shouting. There was only a moment left. They were standing in the narrow passageway near the door of the car. "Go, dear," she whispered bravely, pushing a weak little fist against his chest, "go now, or you will not have time."

"Good-by," said Gaunt, huskily, "write and tell me how the little sister progresses. I shall be anxious, because I know that if she suffers, you will be suffering too." He felt the train moving and drew her into his arms for an instant. He gained the platform without difficulty.

Outside the railing, he found Mrs. St. Judas, or Hattie Leal, as she still sometimes preferred to call herself. She had been waiting for him, and frankly admitted it.

"I wanted to have a talk with you, Mr. Gaunt," she said pleasantly, holding out a neatly gloved hand, "so I waited for you. Do you mind?"

Gaunt glanced into the little impish face and replied gallantly: "Mind, you foolish girl? I'm delighted. Walk back with me to my office, where we shall not be disturbed. If there is any human driftwood waiting for me there, I will scatter it, in deference to you."

The usually sprightly Hattie was in a sober mood this

morning—a desperately sober one. There was a serious look in her eyes, and her wicked little mouth drooped lugubriously at the corners. Still, the courteous deference of Gaunt's greeting brought the flicker of a smile to her brown face. She was pleased, and she showed it. What person of her type ever failed to show pleasure at being addressed as a "girl?"

They picked their way through the soiled streets upon which the sun beat down with a deadly, uncompromising glare. "I always think," declared the little woman, as she tucked up her skirts preparatory to crossing a particularly odious puddle, "that one would be justified in considering Chicago, as a place of residence, a little inferior to hell"—she cleared the puddle with a neat jump—"if there were not so many agreeable people in it. Hell is peopled solely with evil spirits, is it not?"

"Yes," assented Gaunt, gloomily, "chiefly with the spirits of people who while on earth wrote startling books and drank cocktails before breakfast. Speaking of those abominable creations reminds me that I am going to swear off."

"Which?" interjected the young woman, saucily, "the books or the cocktails?"

"The cocktails, of course," was the brisk reply. "I've sworn off books ever since I read 'A Flirtation with Fate.' I shall never again have courage to look into anything with Marie St. Judas on the cover."

"Was it so very dreadful?" asked the lady, penitently.

"No, not exactly dreadful, but too real to be comfortable. It reads like a story of an actual person; and I hate stories that do that, especially when they end sadly. Pshaw, what nonsense we are talking. And I perceive, young woman, that your bright face has clouded over since I expressed an aversion, not to realism in literature, but to cocktails. Never mind. The virtue of my own resolution is so sweet to me that I will not invite you to share it. Here we are at the office. I shall order the artist in the basement to send you up a mint julep."

He noted with satisfaction the change that the suggestion

wrought in the literary person's face. In making it, he had not been entirely free from guile. He had a suspicion that she was about to call him to account in some way, and he did not feel quite equal to a battle of wits just then — at least not on equal terms.

In his office Romney and Haverstraw were still seated, and the expression of suppressed mirth on the demure face of the stenographer formed a certain index to the tenor of their conversation. They behaved with discretion. On seeing Gaunt enter with a lady, Romney rose with great politeness and said he had called to make a payment on a piece of real estate on the corner opposite, but would return in an hour; while his friend simply remarked that Mr. Gaunt's regular subscription to the Flowery Foundling Asylum was due, and that he could send a check at his convenience. The two vanished side by side, like a pair of comedians in a farce, turning to grin at Gaunt with vague suggestion as the latter placed a chair for his visitor in his private office.

In three minutes a boy, by Gaunt's orders, had brought the promised beverage, and little Mrs. St. Judas, with her willful mouth puckered over two straws, was looking at him waspishly and asking: "Mr. Gaunt, what are you doing with my sister?"

The Sinner pulled himself together, and tried to look unconcerned. "I don't think I quite understand," he replied, somewhat coldly; "won't you be good enough to explain?"

The willful mouth divorced itself from the straws, albeit with reluctance, and became hard and firm. "Don't jest," said the young woman coolly; "you are far too clever a man to try to cheat yourself into the belief that you can deceive a woman like me. Mr. Gaunt, be frank. I haven't the least idea that you are a villain; and I am tolerably certain that you are not a fool. Tell me how far this affair has gone and whether it is going any further."

The "clever" man looked at the clever woman and tried to laugh. It would not do. Then, as the pugilists would

say, he "sparred for breath." "What do you mean," he asked suddenly, "by 'this affair'?"

Mrs. St. Judas dropped her square little jaw into her hard little hand and leaning her elbow on the tablet of the desk, stared at her quarry fixedly. "Mr. Gaunt," she said with some solemnity, lowering her voice so as to render it inaudible to the amanuensis in the next room, "I told you once before, jocularly, that Imogen was the saint of our family. I mean it, and I repeat it."

"Yes," assented Gaunt, and waited for her to go on.

"By that," insisted the author of that fin-de-siecle novel, "A Flirtation with Fate," biting her lower lip nervously and working her throat as though trying to swallow something that declined to descend, "I mean that Imogen is different from me. She says her prayers, you know, and goes to church and all that sort of thing. Besides, she nurses my little brother and sister when they are ill, and she has even been good to me—I, who am beyond the pale now, you know, can look back into the fold from which I have been driven before the flaming sword of parental wrath, and worship and venerate my *good* sister." She endeavored to place a sneering inflection upon the last words, but the effort was scarcely a success. Mrs. St. Judas for once in her life looked tremendously serious, and anything but happy.

Gaunt was both mystified and uncomfortable. Hattie Leal-St. Judas in any mood was hardly to his taste; in a sentimental one she was disconcerting. Still, his politeness did not forsake him. "I quite understand why you should be fond of your sister," he said gently, "and it is easy for me to believe all that you tell me concerning her goodness. But you must forgive me if I can't quite see why you should tell me something it is so very easy for me to see for myself."

Mrs. Hattie St. Judas sat up very straight and her next words came sharply from her thin lips, like the patter of hailstones on a roof. "Eustace Gaunt," she declared sternly, looking him full in the eyes, "if you dare to attempt to guy

me at this stage of the game, I shall cut your acquaintance."

"Nothing was further from my intention," protested the young man, in amazement. "I simply said I knew your sister to be the next thing to an angel in goodness. Any fool could tell that, merely by looking at her. Why should it make you angry to hear me say it?"

"Because it's you who have done the mischief," snapped the little woman savagely, "and because I'm afraid of you, Mr. Eustace Gaunt—afraid for my sister. Do you think I want her ever to be—*like me*?"

Gaunt could not have repressed a smile at the frankness of the question, if the speaker had not looked so woefully serious. "I can't quite see wherein I have offended," he expostulated, "but I'll try to, in all humility, if you'll explain."

She looked mollified, and assumed a lighter tone at once, as she continued: "Then let me tell you. In all her life I have never known Imogen to do an inadvisable or indiscreet thing. When I say that she is the saint of our family I do not exaggerate. There has never been any limit to her goodness. That is why I am so astounded by her doings now. When she received you, alone, in our apartment, I was astounded. When she went out with you alone I was astounded again. When she told me an hour ago that she had telegraphed you to come to the train and that I must go away when you came, so that she could bid good-by to you *alone*, I could not credit my senses. You may be proud of your work, sir, if there is anything to be proud of; for if my own mother had told me that Imogen would ever lose her head to such an extent with a man who is married, as you are, I would have laughed at her for an idiot."

"If your sister were less good than I know her to be," said Gaunt in a low voice, "I would not have cared to look at her twice."

A sneer, bitter and cynical, curled itself across the little woman's lips. "How chivalrous!" she rejoined, "and—pardon me for saying it!—how very masculine! When did

the thought of goodness (and the possibility of contaminating it) ever fail to attract a really cultivated man?"

Gaunt leaned forward and grasped one of the speaker's thin wrists rather ungently: "When you assume that tone," he said sternly, "you convince me that your professed affection for your sister is more or less a hypocrisy and a sham. It is, perhaps, an insult to her that I should dare to care for her at all, but her own sister is the last person from whom I should have expected to hear a suggestion as to the possibility of her suffering contamination at my hands, or at the hands of any man."

She noticed the pallor of his face and the suppressed passion with which he spoke. Looking once more into his eyes, closely and searchingly, she detected the merest suspicion of moisture in them. She held out both hands to him impulsively, saying in a low voice, "Forgive me, old boy. I was nasty." Then she added quickly, "Do you love my sister?"

Gaunt was silent. The glare of the sun outside had made his head ache and he was wishing that the interview would end.

She repeated the question remorselessly, "Do you love my sister?"

"I cannot tell you that," he answered slowly.

"Why not?" snapped his inquisitor again. "Because it's something to be ashamed of?"

"I will tell you this, though," he went on; "I promise you, as a man and a gentleman, she shall never know a moment of pain or sorrow that I can save her. *I would sacrifice the dearest thing in life if by so doing I could save her an hour of suffering.*"

The steely eyes of Imogen Leal's sister pinned him to a recognition of the gravity of his pledge. "Will you swear to me that you mean that?" she asked, almost in a whisper.

"I mean it," answered Gaunt frankly, "and if the occasion should ever arise, I will prove to you that I did not give the pledge idly."

Mrs. St. Judas rose to her feet. A glow came over her queer little face, making it look almost agreeable. "You mustn't suspect me of trying to be theatrical," she said timidly, "I hate people who are theatrical in real life. But you are very chivalrous, Mr. Gaunt, and you must let me tell you so. You love my sister—ah, you need not deny it!—and perhaps you can't help it. It will bring sorrow to both of you—I know that. I know, too, that you will be generous—you will not let her suffer more than she must. I've suffered, Mr. Gaunt (though I didn't mean to speak of that), and I'd rather see Imogen dead than have her—well, like me. It's a bitter thing to say of one's self, is it not? But I'm tough, you know, and I can stand it. She never could. That is why I—"

The courageous little campaigner's voice broke. Her brown face puckered up strangely and she actually looked as if she were going to cry. The humor of this circumstance did not appeal to Gaunt at the moment or he would have laughed outright. "That's twice you've expressed a disinclination to see your sister 'like you.'" he remarked pleasantly. "Why should you say that? I am sure you are not such a terrible person."

The lady recovered herself sufficiently to essay a blush. "I don't mean that I'm an abandoned wretch, of course," she said in a low tone. "But there's such an awful difference between us, you know. I am just sick enough of myself, and of the coquetting with life in which I indulge, to make me feel sure I would rather die than see my sister deteriorate sufficiently to resemble me in the smallest particular. You know what I mean. She's all white, and clean and sweet, you know; I'm all grimy and black, I suppose. I feel that I am, sometimes. Fancy my little saint drinking whisky, or smoking cigarettes, or—I won't think of it any more. I can't bear it."

Tears glistened in the shrewd eyes now. The young man was deeply touched. Never before had he known Mrs. St. Judas to exhibit sentiment so solemn, and the idea of

a confirmed cynic of her type uttering words of self-disparagement in order to accentuate her sister's goodness struck him as almost pathetic. He felt himself quite at a loss what to say or do. but on reflection took one of the brown hands, with its closely bitten finger-nails, in one of his own and shook it in comrade's fashion. At that moment his feelings toward this queer little person more closely resembled respect than they had at any time in his memory.

"If all women had as little to be ashamed of as you, my dear," he said soothingly, and with a magnanimous disregard of facts, "there'd be considerably less woe in the world. You've proved your fidelity to Imogen, if nothing else. But you must not make gloomy prophecies. No grief is coming to her if I can prevent it. For the present, I'm too happy to know there's such a being on earth to care much for the consequences. Now finish your julep."

After the fashion of most worldly characters, Mrs. St. Judas, having manifested an altogether creditable and praiseworthy line of sentiment, straightway began to pretend that she was ashamed of it. She attacked her straws with enthusiasm, and between sips of the invigorating beverage poked fun at herself for what she proceeded to term her "display of unbridled emotion." Then, having emptied her tumbler and made a series of funny little dabs at her eyes with her handkerchief, she rose and departed, after extracting from Gaunt a promise, which he by no means intended to keep, that he would come and see her.

She had not been out of sight five minutes before a vigorous "Waugh-waughing" in the hallway warned Gaunt of the approach of a distinguished personage. He rose briskly from his chair to meet the Major, who blew into the office like a warm Kansas whirlwind, mopping his brow with his handkerchief and breathing like a platoon of steam-engines.

"Ah," he ejaculated, extending a big hand cordially, "hard at work, I see."

"Yes," answered the young man wearily, "it's a terrible

grind this hot weather, but one has to labor to live, you know; so I just keep at it."

"That's right," declared the Major approvingly, "work's an excellent thing—Waugh! Waugh!—for young people, waugh! When I'm at home I work like the devil. That's the reason I enjoy myself so much when I'm away. But you're working too hard, young man, you really are. You look pale. Come out and take a drink."

Gaunt courteously declined the invitation on the score of the excessive heat; whereupon the old gentleman, taking a seat, unfolded the plan that had brought him over from his hotel. "There's a little chum of Ducks' come on to share her visit with her," he explained, "charming little thing—waugh! Daughter of an old friend of mine—army chaplain, you know—dead now, poor old chap. The girls want to go for a drive and Ducks was bound I should come and get you. Ducks likes you, young fellow, so I guess you must be a good sort. You'll come, of course?"

Gaunt thought rapidly for a moment. In his present mood work was impossible and the Major's proposal provided him with an excuse to break an appointment he had made for the afternoon with his wife. It was not that he had any wish to disappoint her, but he had still sufficient conscience left to render both difficult and distasteful the task of facing her at a time when his thoughts of another woman were filling his heart and brain. As a consequence, he thanked the Major and agreed to his proposal.

They were about to leave the office together when shambling steps were heard in the corridor and Romney and Haverstraw entered, arm in arm, moving in a sort of lockstep, and in a high state of exhilaration. One of Haverstraw's failings, when in such a condition, was a lack of reverence for his elders, and Gaunt was not at all surprised, though a trifle disconcerted, when he asked, in bland tones, "Who's your pulpy friend, Eustace?"

Romney tried to look indignant, regretful and sympathetic all at once, and as a result of his effort, exploded a

laugh into the palm of his hand. Gaunt tapped the floor impatiently with his foot and looked out of the window. The Major strutted a few steps and remarked, doubtfully, "Ah—waugh!"

"Cough like that again; I want to learn it," went on Haverstraw, quite unabashed. "You're discharged," he added, turning to Gaunt, "for being sober in daylight. This must be the Major. I know those whiskers from hearsay. How-de-do, old horse? What Midway show have you come to join, hay?"

He walked up to the Major in a half-moon path, and extended his hand cordially. The old gentleman, who, as I have hinted, was never known to display indignation when treated with palpable disrespect, took the youth's humorous attack in good part and accepted the proffered hand gracefully enough. This pleased Haverstraw so much tha he demanded the privilege of kissing the Major and of lending him money. When both were denied he wept like a child and ended by offering to buy a coach and drive the entire party to the Fair grounds, in order, as he said, to square matters. When Gaunt succeeded in rescuing the Major from the building, the sound of a duet, lustily carolled by the pair of lively young blades above, came floating to them through the windows; on hearing which the Major glanced back and growled amiably, "Shoot me, if I don't believe you're all crazy in this town this year. Makes me feel young again myself—waugh!"

In reply to suggestions and queries by his elderly companion, Gaunt agreed to be at the hotel at three o'clock with a suitable turn-out. With that understanding he left him to pursue some business of his own that needed attention in the meantime. He did not neglect, however, to send a telegram to his wife apprising her of the alteration in his plans. He could not afford to keep horses himself, but had an arrangement with a not too avaricious stableman on the Lake Front whereby, for a given sum each month, he held a lien on a pair of fleet sorrel colts worth any man's

time to handle. Driving these colts to a high cart, with smart brown harness and other trappings in harmony, he imagined, as he drew up in front of the hotel at the appointed time, that his appearance was rather fit.

Miss Plum, who was waiting on the steps, fluttered across the sidewalk and climbed to the box seat beside him with an alacrity that he felt to be complimentary, inasmuch as it evidenced her determination that no one else should secure that position. The tireless Major presently emerged, with the "little chum" on his arm, and the tender solicitude with which he assisted her into the vehicle suggested a regard quite as strong, possibly, as that borne towards her by "Ducks." This "chum" was a provokingly pretty little person, plump of figure and with big round eyes, like a robin's; and when she spoke she pouted ingenuously and looked mystified. She was made known to Gaunt as Miss Trenton; and, readily comprehending from the Major's manner that efforts on his part to entertain her would not be appreciated, he confined his attentions from the outset to his companion in front.

He was a fairly expert horseman, and in the mood in which he found himself to-day, the management of the pair of mettlesome nags was a diversion about as closely to his liking as any that he could have found. The colts were fresh, and when he discovered the gallant warrior in his rear displaying a tendency to fly into fits of terror at the smallest exhibition of nervousness or temper on their part, he wickedly resolved to enjoy some amusement at his expense. As a consequence, he drove toward the North Side at a brisk pace through the crowded avenue, shaving heavy trucks and drays by the scantiest of margins and plying his whip smartly upon the slightest misbehavior of his beasts. The result delighted him beyond measure. The Major's conversation from Madison Street to the river consisted of a succession of "Waughs" and "O Lords," uttered vociferously and with a degree of anguish modulated upon the precise degree of peril in which he believed himself to

be. His daughter and Miss Trenton appeared to enjoy his distress as keenly as Gaunt, who for his part experienced some little relief by reason of the old gentleman's timidity. He felt reasonably certain that a person so easily frightened could not very well have found the hardihood to stain his hands with the blood of many of his fellow-creatures in battle.

As they trotted briskly over the bridge, Miss Plum murmured: "How splendidly you drive, Mr. Gaunt. I would feel safe with you anywhere."

The young man's weakest spot was his pride in his skill as a whip. The lady's recognition of that skill stamped her in his eyes as a person of wisdom and discernment. He began to like her better, and before they had gone a mile they were conversing with great amiability. The Major, too, once his dread of the crowded streets had been removed, became cheerful and, as they dashed through the Park, discoursed with great prolixity upon every topic invented since the flood. He managed, withal, to be so entertaining and to utter so many profound and palpable exaggerations with so convincing an air of sincerity, that it was easy to forgive him for any fussiness that he had previously exhibited. Gaunt, whose cattle kept him sufficiently busy to prevent his talking much, even if the Major would have given him a chance, found himself vastly amused. Nor could he help admiring the old gentleman's fund of actual knowledge, which would crop out despite the ostentation with which he aired it. As they turned to the right and dashed into that famous Lake Shore Drive, upon which Chicago has so undeniable a right to vaunt herself, the fine old warrior thawed and expanded more and more, going so far, in his enthusiasm, as to hum some snatches of song and, encircling Miss Trenton's plump waist with his arm, address her affectionately as "sweetheart;" an attention to which, to do the young lady justice, she did not seem in the least averse.

"Don't mind papa," urged Miss Plum, observing Gaunt's

confusion, "that's the way he always behaves when he's away from home."

"What's that, Ducks?" roared papa, in awful tones.

"You heard what I said, dear," remarked his daughter placidly, and not in the least awed or abashed, "please don't shout at me like that. It gives me neuralgic pains in my head."

"Waugh!" replied the Major, sagely, reduced to meekness, as usual, by the indisposition of the person he addressed to be bluffed, and then added, diplomatically, "Say, Ducks, aren't you dry?"

Miss Trenton giggled and Miss Plum confessed frankly that she thought she could be persuaded to drink some champagne. So a mile or so farther along the road they pulled up at a quaint German "garden," a place possessed of some preposterous statuary and a murderous brass band, where the Major became the host. They drank their wine in a little wooden pavilion, on the very edge of the lake. Miss Trenton's black eyes twinkled saucily as she sipped the sparkling amber liquid and Miss Plum looked out across the water and sighed. The good Major folded his hands across his waistcoat and wheezed gently, like a tired sheep. They made an effective group.

"There isn't anything so divine," announced Miss Plum, sentimentally, "as a summer's day—and champagne."

"I like it by moonlight better," declared Miss Trenton, with a most enticing little grimace.

Miss Plum detected Gaunt scrutinizing her friend rather closely, and she moved her chair in such a way as to cause her shoulder to obscure his view of the younger lady's white throat and rounded bust. "Which do you prefer, Mr. Gaunt?" she asked archly, "sunlight or moonlight?"

The young man caught her glance and it affected him disagreeably. He could not have told why, but it made him feel as if he were going to prison. "Either is perfect in its way," he answered, "and I surely can't be blamed if I find the sunlight perfect at present."

"Always the courtier, sir," protested the Major's daughter, with another arch look. "I suppose you mean us to think by that you consider us perfect." (Gaunt shook his head in disclaimer.) "I think you are the worst fibber I ever met, Mr. Gaunt. Don't you think he is, Effie?"

"Oh, I don't know," demurred that damsel, with a reflective glance at the Major, "there are a few others that I might name—"

"Waugh!" The Major came back to life again with a start, and announced that it was time to go. They were to dine with friends at a hotel near the Fair grounds, he explained, and would it be imposing on Gaunt to ask him to drive them up there? Not at all? Good! "Then let's be off and be darned to us—waugh!"

The return drive was rapid. In the rear seat, the Major recommenced his doze before they had gone a mile. The heat was sufficient to make one drowsy, in any event, and no one had much to say on the way back to town. The jolting over the stones after crossing the bridge temporarily roused the Major, but the smooth roadbed of Michigan avenue closed his eyes once more. It was dusk now, however, and no one noticed his comfortable attitude, or the deliciously simple manner in which one of his hands reposed in the lap of Miss Trenton, where it was judiciously caressed from time to time by that wide-awake young lady's tapering white fingers.

And then came an adventure.

As the cart neared the Fortieth Street crossing an elevated train was passing overhead. Frightened by the rumbling, and fractious after his long, swift trot, the off colt reared and shied violently and then stood still squarely upon his four feet, refusing to move. His mate stood by placidly enough, aiding and abetting the insurrection by an attitude of masterly inactivity.

It might have been well enough to let them rest there had it not been for another consideration, of which Gaunt was reminded with disagreeable abruptness. Not until the

roar of a train rang on his ears in the gloom did he recall that a railroad track ran along that street and that the cart was standing squarely upon it. There was but an instant in which to act. As the headlight of the engine flashed in his eyes, he rose in his seat, and slipping his hands up to a short hold on the reins, gave a heave that brought the cart and the noses of the two colts just clear of the track. And then came the real peril, the delicious fury of fight. It was a long train of freight cars, and as it went rumbling past, the horses, crazed with dread, reared and plunged, striking out with their hoofs, and threatening every instant to either touch the train or fall backwards over the dashboard. The amateur jehu had considerable strength in his arms and wrists and he held the reins in a tight clutch with his left hand, while with the whip in his right he lashed away steadily at the backs of the plunging beasts, ordering them at the same time, in calm, even tones, to stand still. What he most dreaded was an upset. Strangely enough, the thought of serious bodily peril never occurred to him; his one consuming fear was that of being made to appear ridiculous.

It was all over in a couple of minutes, though it seemed much longer. When the last car had gone clattering by, Gaunt found he had worked the animals back ten feet or so, quite out of danger, and he realized that his performance had been by no means a remarkable one, though it might have seemed so to the young woman on the seat beside him. He feared she might be seriously frightened and glanced at her apprehensively. His apprehension was groundless. She was perfectly self-possessed, though rather white, and at that instant he admired her immensely. So many women, similarly situated, would have fainted or at least squealed. But as he loosened his reins and the colts flew southward once more, he remembered the Major in the back seat, and braced himself for the explosion of the wrath to come.

The same thought must have come to Miss Plum, for she glanced back at the same moment. Both laughed.

For neither the fine old warrior nor the agreeable girl

at his side had seen or heard an atom of the disturbance. They were both slumbering placidly in the fast-gathering darkness, their heads close together, and on their features an expression of unutterable content. The old gentleman's hat was on his knee and his flowing silver locks were trailing touchingly across the rose-pink ear of his "sweetheart." It was a moving tableau.

"Well!" ejaculated Gaunt, "I'm glad of that. If your father had caught me in my fix he'd never have forgiven me."

Miss Plum looked very serious. Her mouth trembled queerly and she did not reply.

"It was inexcusable in me," went on the culprit, hurriedly and shamefacedly, "not to have remembered that railroad crossing, and I suppose the rumbling of the cars overhead prevented my hearing the surface train coming. I shall never forgive myself. Were you dreadfully frightened?"

"No, not very," she answered quietly. "I was too busy watching you. The way you handled those horses was impressive."

The inborn vanity of man asserted itself at this point and Gaunt drove the rest of the way feeling as though he had really done a very meritorious act. He paid little further attention to Miss Plum, because he was tired, mentally as well as physically, and was actually conscious, amazing as it may seem, of a commonplace desire for slippers and a smoking-jacket, and a romp with his little boy. He was, in consequence, a little startled, on nearing the end of their journey, to feel the light clasp of a gloved hand on his arm, and hear an earnest voice whisper: "I didn't like you in New York, but I do in Chicago. I simply love a man with his wits about him."

She had timed the observation skillfully, for Gaunt pulled up in front of the hotel at the moment it was made and she had risen and climbed to the ground before he had time to reply to it. The jolt of stopping awoke the Major, who

sat up straight with a volcanic "Ah-waugh!" and hastily alighted. Gaunt declined an invitation to remain, and, wheeling his nags, was off like a shot, conscious, however, of a long stare of kindly regard sent after him by Miss Plum.

He stopped at the first corner to telephone for a man to come to his house for the trap and drove home at a speed that excited remonstrances from boulevard policemen. He felt as though some miracle were transpiring in his brain; for the departure of the charmer of his dreams, over which he had been mourning in anticipation for days and in actuality all this afternoon, was now inspiring him with a distinct sense of gladness, in the thought that it would enable him to renew his acquaintance with his family.

He had quite forgotten the narrow escape and the two minutes of supreme peril through which he had lately passed, except to acknowledge dreamily his indebtedness to Providence for not sending him home to his son a cripple. As he neared the house his mood became almost virtuous. The slippers and the smoking-coat and the romp seemed more alluring than ever.

CHAPTER VIII

AN UNCONSCIOUS WARNING

"Elaine."

Mrs. Gaunt looked up from the diminutive stocking that she was engaged in darning. Under the pale pink shade of the lamp by which she was sitting, the tint of her face was delicious. Her husband had noticed it.

"Well?"

There was a bit of challenge in the tone, and a suspicion of tenderness too. As she turned her graceful head, with its coils of burnished brown hair, her profile looked exquisitely girlish. Her deshabille was charming.

"Come over here by me a moment, will you?"

Dutifully and without reluctance the young wife rose and crossed the room to the lounge upon which her liege lord was reclining. She sank into a low chair at his side and leaning forward, let fall her dainty chin into her right hand, waiting for him to speak.

Gaunt looked rather pale, and his manner was languid. He was in his shirt sleeves, and on his bared wrist his pulse throbbed perceptibly. He looked his wife in the eyes for a full minute without speaking. When he did speak, his words were commonplace.

"Dearie," he drawled slowly, with an attempt at indifference that was a failure, "how many times have I been drunk this month?"

"I should not say," she replied, without hestitation and with great generosity, "that you had been drunk at all—that is, not really drunk; only foolish and unreasonable."

"True," replied Gaunt, with some condescension, feeling that if she declined to admit his frailty it would be absurd in him to do so, "but, so far as I can see, it is as criminal in me to drink myself into a mere condition of irresponsibility and unreason as it is in a man of inferior intelligence to deport himself as a sot. Can you tell me why I do it?"

"I think, Eustace," answered Mrs. Gaunt, with the simplicity of absolute truth, "it is because you have very little sense and are getting to have less, all the time."

"I believe you are right," acquiesced her husband gracefully. "Elaine, there was a time when I considered myself a rather bright man. I am rapidly acquiring the opinion that I am an imbecile, and a very abandoned imbecile at that."

Having every reason to concur in this opinion, Mrs. Gaunt was still disinclined to permit any one save herself to express it. She was nothing if not womanly.

"Dear," she said gently, "you know you're not a fool. I think it's just because you are thoughtless. I don't believe you'd hurt me, willingly."

The pathos of the remark affected her husband deeply.

The patience that will defend selfishness to the uttermost limit, even when its continued maintenance is a perpetual menace to her own peace, is found only in a wholly unselfish wife. He looked at the gentle face, held in affectionate and condoning proximity to his own, and moisture came to his eyes. He felt weak and unstrung.

As he opened his arms for the embrace so sweetly and generously bestowed, his soul was writhing with the bitterness of the thought that he was unworthy to receive it. Even then he was inwardly berating himself as a counterfeit and a cheat, because he knew that the fault of over-indulgence in wine, for which he had affected to blame himself so deeply, was a trifling offense beside the monumental iniquity of the infatuation that was robbing him of all his peace. It was that infatuation that had led him into constant self-indulgence in the vain effort to forget it. It was so strong upon him at this moment that the pure home atmosphere he was now enjoying seemed tame and commonplace; and yet he felt he could give a hundred worlds, if they were his, to rid himself of the mania that possessed him.

His fingers twined themselves gently in his wife's hair. Her face was close to his own, as she whispered, "I don't mind the little things, dear. You love me, and after all that's the great thing."

The man could not answer her. His remorse was almost laughable, it was so acute. He glanced past her, and saw a sight that loosened the tension of his nerves and afforded him some relief. "Look," he said, softly.

Their little boy, the curly, golden-haired rascal whom their souls idolized, had fallen asleep, with his head on an open picture-book, and his feet sprawling amid a litter of toy dogs and horses, tin soldiers and the like. With a charming murmur of self-reproach, his mother picked him up and tenderly laid him in his crib. He did not awaken, and his parent stooped and kissed his pink cheek softly, before leaving him to his rest.

They were standing together for a moment side by side before a tall mirror. "Sonny, dear," demanded his wife, calling him by a pet name she had invented for him in the days of truant-playing and matinees; "you have always been faithful to me, have you not?"

"Always," averred Gaunt. With most men, technical fidelity passes for the actual article.

"I believe you have," sighed the child-wife contentedly, and then added, with some firmness, "If you were not—well, that is the one thing I would never forgive."

CHAPTER IX

THE PATHWAY OF DELIRIUM

"* * * * it is unpardonable, unrighteous, inexcusable; but, dear, it is more than life to me now, and sometimes it seems to me that it cannot really be so very wrong, because I am going to pay for it all so soon. When I am dead—then, then she will have you all for her own; and you sometimes, when you are sitting at nights with your boy—the dear little fellow you worship so!—something (the play of the shadows, maybe, on the wall, or a note in a piece of music, or some beautiful, tender line in a verse) will bring me back to you again, just for a moment, and a mist will come to your eyes and an ache to your heart. No; I do not think you will ever quite forget me—not quite.

"You must not think I am sad always, dear, because I am not. I have so much to be thankful for. You see, before I knew you—before the beautiful dream began—I had nothing to look forward to but the dolorous and inevitable end. The brightness of the world was a bitterness to me, and the happiness of others, oh, such a pitiful mockery! Now it is all different. I have known a joy beyond words, a happiness beyond belief. I have looked into your dear,

good eyes and have seen the love and worship there. I have known what it was to feel myself belonging to you—a part of your inner being—of your best self. O, most dearly beloved!—I have trembled under your touch and have felt afraid before the worship of your voice and look. My joy in all this is written in my heart, as my memories are burned in my brain; and when the darkness comes, and the night, and I am quite, quite alone with my thoughts of you, then, dear, I pray God to forgive me for the sin of it, but beseech Him, too, to let me go on living, so I may love you yet a little while longer.

"Sometimes I try to believe that that cruel doctor of mine is all wrong, and that I am not ill or in danger at all—that I am to live just as long as any one; and when I think that, then it frightens me, because if I were going to live, you know, I should have to give you up at once. It is only the thought of my dying that seems to take away the wrong. And do you think I mind it? Dear, I don't—not one single, foolish little atom. Will you believe something that sounds really extravagant? Come, then, close—closer yet—and I will whisper it to you, so; I would rather know that I am to die, *and love you*, than I would have the silly doctor tell me I was going to get well, *and know that I must give you up*. That sounds so foolish that I will not say it again. Only, you must think of it when your conscience tells you that I am very, very wicked, and perhaps it will make you forgive me.

"But, darling, darling, I don't want to die—soon, I mean. I'm such a coward—ah, I'm so terribly afraid! I wasn't before, but I am now—now that I know it means leaving you, forever. Forever and forever, dear! Do you ever think of that? Can you realize it? To be gone—dead—to be nothing—for thousands and millions of years, just as though you had never been anything at all—ah, dear, it is so terrible! Terrible because you are not going with me—terrible because I've no right—oh, I can't tell you why it is so terrible. There are so many reasons, and I'm so weak and

faint and afraid. Only sometimes I think: 'Yes, I shall see him once more—just once more, because he has promised it, and he will always keep his word.' And I say to my heart—the poor heart, you know, that is going to stop beating some day—cruelly, and kill me, and that even now, in the night, sometimes beats so fearfully fast, and then almost stops—I say to it: 'Dear, kind, good old heart, please go on a little while, just a very little longer, and let me see him once, just once more, and then I'll be good, and go just whenever you like, without grumbling one bit. You'll do this for me, won't you, old heart, because I'm very patient and don't blame you for what you're going to do to me? You can't help it. You have to do it, I suppose. But you'll let me see him first, won't you, heart?'

"Then, when I've said this little prayer to my worn-out, cowardly old heart, I feel better and braver, and it seems to beat, oh, ever so much more evenly and strongly. That gives me courage to say my real prayers, the ones I've said since I was a little girl, you know—'Our Father,' and 'Now I Lay Me,' and a long, earnest one for little sister, who's getting better, I'm glad to say, but very slowly. Perhaps it's very wicked of me to dare to say any prayers at all, when I dare to go right on loving you. But I won't think of that. If I didn't love you, and you didn't love me, I wouldn't care for prayers, or death, or God, or anything. I'd just be bad—really bad—then, and nothing would matter.

"Oh, how doleful I am, when I ought to be so strong and brave this beautiful, bright morning! Dearest, I will not vex you any more with my complaining. I'll not even beg you any more to come to me. I know you will come, just as soon as you can, because you have said that you will; and I trust you, dear. You are so chivalrous and brave and good; I know you would come, even if you did not want to, and you do want to, don't you, Eustace?

"Last night, when I kissed little sister, she put her poor, thin little arms tight round my neck and whispered, 'Imogen, you're so good.' I can't be quite bad, or God wouldn't

let that angel love me. Say I'm good, Eustace! I order you to say it, do you hear? And say that you love me, too, do you hear that? And you will come—you *are* coming—soon! I feel it. I know it. It will be soon, won't it, dear? . . . .

"Eustace Gaunt, if you let men or angels keep you in Chicago over Sunday, my heart will break." . . . .

The postman had tossed the letter upon the desk as carelessly as if it had been a thing of no consequence or value. Gaunt had picked it up idly and read it almost to the end before he had realized its tragic purport. When he had read it through slowly, twice, he laid it aside gently, and began drumming on the desk with his fingers. He looked out into the street without seeing anything there, and his lip trembled.

He had corresponded regularly with Imogen since she had gone away. She had written him many letters, and their influence in a certain way had shaped his forms of thought and wound itself about his heart. She had alluded at times, lightly and heedlessly, to the physical ailment from which she suffered, but this was the first occasion upon which she had made it a theme of argument and a pretext for hastening his promised visit. The effect of her words was immediate and forceful.

The man was stunned for a moment. He had never yet found the courage to face the girl's death as a speedy and awful possibility, and now that she wrote of it—spoke of her dread of it—appealed to him, almost, to save her from the agony of its unshared contemplation, he grew nerveless and weak in the immensity of his fear. Outside the sun was shining, grandly and beautifully, in a sky of serenest blue, but there was no beauty for him in the sight. In fact, he did not see it. He saw, instead, a slender girl, with proud, pure eyes, bending solicitously over the "little sister," and then wandering away, alone and helpless, into a darkened chamber, to temporize and plead with her remorseless tor-

menter—Death. A sigh that was almost a groan escaped him. He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

The hum and drone of the traffic in the street buzzed through his brain relentlessly. There came no single clear or lucid thought to him—only an odd jumble of ideas, foremost of which was the impression that Fate was sweeping him against his will toward a deplorable and impossible situation. He picked up the letter and read it again. A moment or two of earnest thought. He raised his hand to the electric call above his desk to summon a telegraph messenger, but paused at the sound of footsteps entering his office. He slipped the letter into his pocket, as his friends Romney and Haverstraw advanced to greet him.

These two splendid and most mercurial young gentlemen had a habit of dropping in between three and four o'clock every day on the bare chance of finding some person or piece of business to disturb. They were not always welcome, in the strictest sense, but there was never a time when their expansion of spirit was not infectious. When Gaunt looked at them and perceived their mood, he was not displeased; in his own, any diversion would have been welcome.

Romney, taking up his station at the entrance to the private office, closed his eyes and began to recite Latin prayers in a loud monotone, to which his companion in evil beat an accompaniment on the back of a chair with his walking-stick. Gaunt listened patiently to the din until weariness on the part of its perpetrators compelled its discontinuance. He then asked what it meant.

"Behold!" bellowed the enthusiastic Romney in his resonant bass, "the sad poet—the knight of the rueful countenance, in sooth. Say, Eustace, I know what makes you look so doleful—you work too beastly hard. Look, Harry, how he labors! Behold the sweat on that noble brow. How I wish I had some one to pay me a hundred a week for looking wise."

"You'd never get your money," broke in Harry, opportunely, "that is, you'd never earn it. You couldn't look intelligent to save yourself from hanging. Say, I wish one of you'd be kind enough to pick some of these gray humming-birds off my hat." He began walking around in a small circle, eyeing the atmosphere just above his head apprehensively.

"Thank Heaven!" exclaimed Romney fervently, but with a suggestion of sarcasm, "I'm always willing to go to the Fair with him when it's nothing worse than humming-birds that he thinks he sees. Yesterday it was blue llamas and jack rabbits. What are you going to drink to-day, boy?"

"Calisaya," replied Harry, humbly, "I've done with your common drinks." He made a pass with his cane at an imaginary feathered songster, and turned to Gaunt. "Dear chap," he sang out, blithely, "for a man who leads as sober and rational a life as you do, you look like a fish. Why, even I don't look as tough. Come down and get a bracer."

Gaunt smiled grimly. "Rational life!" He was glad his friends were no wiser. He glanced at Haverstraw and saw that he was again making hypnotic stabs at space with his fingers. At a suggestion from Romney that the open air might do the sufferer good, he yielded, closed his desk with a slam and went downstairs with the twain. A pale gray frozen absinthe on the way out quieted Harry's nerves and put a fairer complexion on existence for all three. And so the inevitable route to that infectious and remarkable Midway was begun.

Delicious and headstrong folly of our unforgotten youth, when all life seemed like one huge and mighty wine-cup and one's only task the draining of it to the dregs! We blush for your wickedness and deplore your consequences, but we mourn your demise and adore you for your memories. Who, in his maturer years of wisdom, when reasons of policy demand abstention and a rebellious liver produces a temperance of habit that would never have been acquired

by choice, does not look back with tenderest affection, albeit with a blush, to the mad, merry days of his twenties? And to be young, healthy and withal comfortably drunk on the Midway Plaisance in the year of our Lord, 1893, in Chicago—one fails to imagine an earthly condition more closely resembling supernal bliss!

It was only one day of many such, though Gaunt had reason to remember it, because it was the last. Did the great western town and its mass of enthusiastic visitors go quite insane on those last few nights at the fag-end of the Fair? When the signs were torn down, the kiosks and candy-stands of the unspeakable Turk blithely rent asunder; when bumptious Columbian guards were stood upon their heads and men and women of respectable antecedents went capering down the roadway, forty abreast, arm-in-arm, laughing and singing like mad? When the Midway was choked with a mass of hilarious roysterers, wherein the wayfarer might secure any brand of bliss that his soul desired, from a smile from some sloe-eyed houri of the Pyramids to the most beautiful impromptu fist-fight imaginable? But I am digressing.

Is not the memory of that day yet warm within the hearts of the two survivors thereof? As a frolic it began, and as a frolic it ended, but oh, the infinite catalogue of diversions in between! Did not the spirit of lordly and magnificent indifference to Fate and Care manifest itself in the behavior of the trio from the very outset? From the beginning it was a spirit of aggression and defiance. Did not the truculent Romney, who was always as long on courage as he was short on physical strength, slap the face of an impertinent cashier in a café on the way to the train, and did not Haverstraw, with equal energy, insist on chanting "God Save the Queen," soulfully and uproariously, when passing the Victoria Hotel. "I'm not English," he protested tearfully, when remonstrated with by his friends on the ardor of his performance, "but my clothes are, and heaven knows they're

loud enough to sing by themselves, but I've simply got to get into the chorus—when we pass a cracker-jack bar like this."

Nonsense? Of course it was nonsense. Worse, perhaps. But who thinks of sense or reason in Carnival time, when the sun flames in the sky like an insolent red jewel and the fire of youth tingles through the veins like champagne? And on the way to the Fair did not the train become "stalled"—as the elegant diction of dear Chicago has it—and did not the perennially thirsty Romney stretch forth his long arms and, with a roar that frightened the sand-pipers on the Indiana dunes miles up the shore, declare that his throat was as parched as a section of Sahara in war-time? And did not the smiling Haverstraw thereupon fish from an inner pocket a flask of goodly proportions, fitted for just such emergencies, whereat his friend, weeping tears of gratitude, hailed him as the savior of his life? And—"ah-h-h!" sighed the gentle Harry feelingly, after a long, long "pull" at the sweet restorer, "that has chased the last humming-bird from my brain; I'm safe till to-morrow morning now!" Dear, dear! When the flask was quite empty, did not the world seem a brighter and fairer place to all three frolickers, and did not their consequent accession of high spirits appear to the three fair passengers opposite a naughtiness supremely shocking, but oh, so charming? For the flask was a handsome silver affair, you see, with a flamboyant crest upon its face, and there was that in the attire and bearing of the three that forbade the impression that they were moulded of common clay. Why is it, I wonder, that reckless conduct in one of gentle bearing is regarded as harmless eccentricity, while in a ruffian of ordinary calibre it would be looked upon as coarse?

That Tour of Three, on mirth and mischief bent—how picturesque it was, and how eventful! Two of the number in search, purely and simply, of noise and adventure; the other of forgetfulness. It was the last time these three good friends were together, and the kindly hours—how rap-

idly they flew! When a hospitable person in charge of the Kentucky exhibit, in the Manufactures Building, had become responsible for the obliteration of more hummingbirds from the Haverstraw brain, and for a responsive enthusiasm on the part of his friends, how bright everything began to look! How joyously the three shook hands with perfect strangers and how benignly, yet withal decorously, they smiled on everything feminine and pretty that passed their way. True, the Circassian lady in the Beauty Show disclosed a Blue Island vocabulary when the gentle Harry, in an effort to do her reverence, salaamed into a fat Turk and sent a shower of cigar-ash into his own eyes. Equally true, the truculent Romney was compelled to submit to a scathing rebuke, in Irish, from a Columbian Guard in preference to suffering arrest, he having been detected in the act of attaching a "To Rent" sign in the rear of the officer's tunic. Hugely funny? Of course, of course; for had not hasheesh and Munchener—a fine combination, truly, for the creation of hilarity in the heart of hotspur youth!—now had a hand in the game, with effective results? What a rugged, whole-souled dinner it was—in the German Village this time—with snappy schnitzel and sausage, washed down with the black brew of Munich, and the band of brass playing Waldteufel waltzes quite rhythmically enough to please drunken people. The stay there was quite extended, if one remembers rightly, and the regular nocturnal riot of the vast show's final week had fairly begun as the trio sought once more the streaming and mercurial Mid.

A sly, slim moon o'erhead, a crisp, clear atmosphere below and a crowd athirst and a-roar for fun. How supremely idiotic it all seems now, and yet how vastly entertaining at the time—this rollicking for mere idleness' sake—this readiness to laugh at nothing, under the impression that it was a joke! The hoarse cries of the hawkers and hucksters; the weird mouthings of Arab fakirs, with gaudy costumes on their backs and vague immorality on their burnished black

faces; the veiled beauties of Turkey and Egypt, down whose necks one dropped small coins—in order to secure the privilege of fishing them out and replacing them with bank-notes—all contributed to the odd confusion of a scene as picturesque as it was evanescent. There were shrieks of laughter merging in waves of song chorused by the light-hearted and ever-moving mob; aye, and other raptures, even more ensnaring and acute. What utter, unreasoning bliss, when a surging mass and a blockaded street evidenced a serious rumpus of some sort, and hurried inquiry developed the fact that a line of Columbian Guards, fearing an out-and-out riot, had stretched themselves across the roadway, dividing the crowd into two sections and forbidding either to cross the deadline of authority! Pooh! Was not there a challenge in the mandate, and was not the prospect of a fight as meat and drink to the famished when waved before the comprehension of three strolling athletes, dreamy with hasheesh and alert for mischief? Had not Gaunt, only a few minutes earlier, met an ancient journalistic enemy riding upon a meek and inoffensive ass, and had he not, with a swift recognition of the incongruity of a Hebraic editor's bestriding such a beast, promptly grabbed the donkey by the ears and upset the rider in the dust? And had not the merry and athletic Haverstraw, merely to prove his possession of a certain fund of physical strength, wrenched a loose window-frame, from which all glass had been shattered, free from its fastenings, and, passing it over the head of an obese Turk, pushed the heathen down the street before him for several hundred yards on a dead run—the wretched victim being in the position of a fugitive who has to preserve his pace in order not to fall? But how silly and inconsequential these minor delights, beside the fierce joy of the valorous Romney's suddenly designed and magnificently executed charge upon that boastful line of Guards! How can the glory of that delicious combat ever fade? "A wedge, boys, a wedge!" shrieks the bass-voiced commander, waving those lean arms in stirring and electric

appeal. And a wedge it is, sure enough, with the dauntless Romney for the thin end, or point, his two friends, with locked arms, immediately in his rear, and a horde of ravening strangers, whom those clarion notes had enthused to battle, streaming and roaring behind! Memories of one's football days fill the brain, and the thing grows too glorious for words. So, it's all together now, with a heave-O! smash! bang!! crash!!! and like a mighty wave, or avalanche, has the "wedge" designed by the festive Mr. Romney torn through that devoted line of Guards, violent as dynamite, resistless as Fate; and then on, until borne by the very fierceness of its own impact into the heart of the mob on the other side; which mob, very justly resenting the intrusion, proceeds to engage the invaders in as beautiful a thing in the way of a free fight as mortal man may wish to see. This fight, maybe, was only one of many of its kind, but was it not the last?—and oh, how blissful! "It's like Balaklava!" bellows Romney, as with his back to the Ferris Wheel fence he hammers away at all comers with praiseworthy impartiality and tireless nerve. And even as his two friends are swept out of sight in that pushing and mauling human maelstrom, each having hostilities of his own to attend to meanwhile, do they not both vow that he is a broth of a boy and deserving of their deathless gratitude for suggesting so splendid a climax to so enlivening a day?

The effect of an experience of this kind, at the close of a period of several hours' mild dissipation of the character described in the foregoing pages, is generally beneficial. Upon a mind more or less flighty by habit, and that has been stimulated by liquid and other indulgence into a certain extravagance of mood, the sudden shock of giving and taking blows exercises a distinctly corrective force. In other words, a fight is the best medicine in the world for a man three parts intoxicated. At the same moment that he is experiencing the felicity of physical combat, the effects of the stimulants within him are being counteracted by one much more powerful and wholesome—the desire to conquer

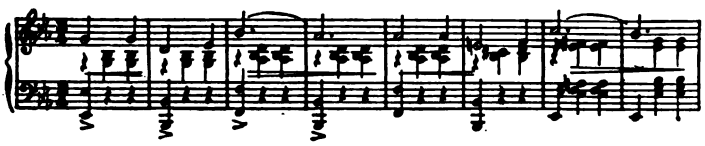
and beat his adversary in a fair and manly struggle. That is why a good, square fight will nearly always sober a roysterer who is not too far gone; even if it does not sober him it will leave him the better for the experience; for a person who is too drunk to be sobered by a fight generally gets the worst of it, and who will say that a drunken man is not benefited by a licking? Incidentally, it may be remarked that a man who gets so drunk that he cannot fight at his best is not a gentleman.

So Gaunt, whatever may have been his condition before he lost his friends, was reasonably sober when, having wearied of the combat, he dropped, more from habit than anything else, into "Old Vienna." There was an hour of music left, and with the exception of a battered straw hat (which, the night being hot, he was not obliged to keep on his head) and a wrecked collar and cravat, the battle of the Midway had not left him looking so very disreputable. He found an obscure corner and discovered presently that his first contact with the atmosphere of this place had re-awakened all his memories. Instead of distressing him, the discovery gave him joy—a keen, fierce joy that, aided by the wine he had drunk, ran hotly through his veins, drowning reason and smothering sense. His nerves were tightened and his brain set on edge by the exhilarating fray from which he had just emerged, and he drank more wine, just because the world at that moment seemed a most beautiful and desirable place, and because the yellow Hungarian liquid, as its subtle aroma stole into his brain, produced an impression that all earthly ills were fictitious, and sadness, consequently, a crime. Imogen Leal doomed? Pooh! Had she not sat there at that table with him only a few nights ago, looking like a dream from an angel's diary? She, die! — die? Bah! How ridiculous! The world would surely come to an end were such an enormity possible. That doctor was an idiot—yes, and a blackguard, to frighten a girl like that. He would cane him when he

went to Washington. More wine—yes; that last draught made the idea of the doctor's error, and of the thrashing, seem more rational. The young man's soul expanded into a broad and heartfelt generosity toward the whole world as he realized, or thought he realized, the wisdom of his reasoning. The jocund moon up there in the heavens was deliberately turning somersaults as he watched it, and the sides of the buildings and the white tables were describing circles and angles and tangents before his eyes, as he reflected, profoundly and benignly, that everything under heaven was exactly as it should be; that every man and woman on earth was his friend and that he himself had never done aught in the world of which to be ashamed. When the wine of Hungary or of any other clime can produce an effect like this, would man not be foolish to refrain from drinking it?

And with the wine, of course, went the music, sweeping onward and ever through the brain and the heart, soothing as a lullaby, soft as a siren's summons to sin. The very incarnation of witchery was in those strings that night. The music was a paean, a requiem, a wail, each in turn—a paean for the departing glories of a marvelous summer, a dirge for delights never to be known again. Haunting harmonies of Mascagni, deviltries of Offenbach, tornadoes of Wagner and of Liszt—followed one another in graceful procession, vibrating upon the brain of the listener as the strings of a harp quiver and sing beneath the caress of a slim hand weighted with gems. To Gaunt, hidden there in his corner, it brought but one memory, that dwarfed all the others and sent Conscience into a corner, shivering; the memory of a white face with two great blue eyes and a mouth that drooped like a Madonna's. In his mood, everything seemed justifiable, from his own stifling of duty to the letter in his pocket—the piteous letter that had thrown him into the mental condition from which there had seemed but one avenue of escape—Wine.

Again, the temper of the orchestra changed and the man with the silver cornet commenced his senseless little lullaby. To Gaunt it seemed almost monotonous in its appeal:



It brought a train of thought in which defiance of possibilities and of consequences was paramount. There was a blur before the young man's eyes, though he distinctly saw Imogen Leal, and the mischievous face of her sister, as he had seen them that night, so long ago, as it seemed now, at that table over yonder. He thought of the letter of this morning, and his determination—which, under the influence then dominating him, seemed a determination wholly proper and just—became fixed and immovable. He left the place with a fair degree of steadiness.

Outside the Fair grounds he found a cab, in which he drove to a hotel not far away that he knew harbored a telegraph operator. He composed, at the first attempt, a despatch that satisfied him:

"I shall leave Chicago Sunday and hope to see you Tuesday. It's ninety years till then."

And, turning from the desk, he encountered, oddly enough, his friend Scott.

The greeting of the theatrical man was hearty. Gaunt had always liked him, and being now indisposed to go home, sat with him in the hotel for several hours, drinking Scotch whisky and soda.

"By the way," drawled Scott sleepily, as they separated, "ever see anything more of your Washington charmer? Gawd, but she was a beauty!"

"No," lied Gaunt handsomely. And he went away shuddering.

CHAPTER X

THREE LITTLE WORDS

She came gliding into the room like a tall, gray ghost and stopped abruptly in the center of it, looking at her visitor furtively, as if apprehensive of some invisible peril. She wore a knot of violets at her throat, and the rich tint of the flowers heightened the pallor of her skin. Her breath came irregularly from between her parted lips.

The man stood there a moment by the mantel, facing her, nervous and irresolute. As her eyes met his own, the "still small voice" of sacerdotal mythology was silenced within him. He gave rein to his passion and became drunk with it. Her greeting, as she sank into his arms, sobbing weakly, was unintelligible. He felt her tears upon his cheek and in the meeting of their lips viewed the passing of his honor without regret.

In that brief moment of abandon, all the uncertainties and doubts, all the self-accusation in the man's mind and all the spirit of resistance in the woman's, seemed swept away. Nothing remained but the sense that each was powerless to withstand the influence of the other. And so the storm broke and the two victims were carried far, far away, helpless as a pair of feathers afloat on a mountain torrent, careless as a couple of African slaves condemned to die at sunrise. The past had distilled and concentrated all its sweetness into the one exquisite pang of surrender; the misery of the future was a matter of indifference.

Never, perhaps, was such love-making seen since this odd world began. The shy embracings, the murmurs of endearment, the inability to coherently construct a sentence, the clasping and unclasping of hands and the rapid interchange

of glances whose one interpretation was the willingness of each, if need be, to die for the other—these are signs and trade-marks, are they not, of the mighty and universe-shaking hysteria that men call Love?—and the insanity was the sweeter to the culprits because so long delayed. The man found ecstasy in merely touching his companion's ebony hair with his fingers and watching the rose tints come and go in her cheeks and throat. The woman, her hands resting upon her idol's shoulders and her eyes drinking from his the grateful certainty that she had made herself his heart's desire, looked as if she asked no more of Heaven. Sweet imbeciles!

Outside the little suburban cottage a furious storm was raging. The wind shook the windows and the rain pelted against them spitefully. A tall lamp, with an orange shade upon it, sent a pleasant glow across the apartment. Tall and serene, like some sweet, gray nun, stood this charmer of men. They had moved apart slightly and she was now resting a dimpled elbow on the mantel and viewing her adorer with tearful, impassioned eyes. He was gazing at her hungrily, but with due self-restraint. There had been a kiss—a long kiss, of the variety that causes men of even temperament to cease marveling at the ways of savages—and it had left them a little disconcerted. He was wondering whether his self-restraint was admirable or ridiculous.

The woman suddenly swayed forward and rested her face shyly and sweetly against his breast. "Dear," she murmured tremulously, "*I will wait.*"

"*I will wait!*"

Something in the words—the mightiness of their import or the subtlety of their inflection—provoked in this man some dawning sense of the truth regarding his own conduct and of the peril that menaced his future. They danced and sang through his brain, and their purport sank home, surely and swiftly, and set his numbed reason to work.

"*I will wait!*" That meant treachery, did it not?—treach-

ery of his own, treachery to the little son that his soul worshiped and to the wife who did not suspect. Heretofore he had given way to his weakness with blindness and indifference. Now that he was confronted suddenly with its natural and probable consequence, he recognized for the first time the grotesque stupidity of his course.

"I will wait!" That meant, of course, but one thing—the sacrifice of his domestic ties upon the altar of his folly. It meant, brutally put, that his enslavement was to be eternal; that Death or Divorce were the only eventualities to be awaited. A chill shot through his heart. He was appalled, not by the thought of his passion—men never repent such passions until scorched by their inevitable fruitage—but by the contemplation of the situation to which it had led.

"I will wait!" Man-like, he would not pause to reflect that the words were justified in every way by his own expressions and acts. He only knew that the inference to be drawn from them shocked him inexpressibly. He had believed he loved this woman; he would have sworn to his love in seventeen different languages—until it confronted him with the possible loss of his wife. And with the wise reasoning of his sex he refused to recognize his own responsibility for the suggestion, but chose to blame it on the woman. She had reigned in his heart as an idol until she had breathed the possibility of usurping the place of the wife he had given her every reason to believe she had supplanted. For that he could not forgive her. Masculine logic is a fearful and exquisite thing.

"*I will wait!*"

Three little words, trifling enough in themselves, but sufficient in this case to unravel a few enigmas and awaken the Dreamer to a hazy understanding of certain palpable moral truths. They exercised, in one way, an effect sufficiently unexpected to be called marvelous. The man had come many miles to see the woman—had made the journey in

the firm conviction that his life's happiness depended upon the sight of her. When he left her, it was with the determination to see her no more, in all his life.

With fine courage, he refrained from telling her of this resolve. She had no inkling of it as he bade her farewell an hour later. Odd as it may seem, he left the cottage to battle with the storm on his way to the train, with a conviction that Heaven had been very merciful—in stopping him in time. For his contemplated desertion in the present case he did not feel the least compunction. These three little words—"I will wait"—seemed to justify it.

CHAPTER XI

THE FULFILLMENT OF A PLEDGE

The city of New York, on a bright, crisp morning in autumn, is a place very easy to associate with Paradise. The rarefied atmosphere, the intense blue of the sky, and the beauty of the buildings that line its streets, combine to create an impression that strangers rarely fail to find agreeable. It is, perhaps, its intense and abiding cleanliness that people from Chicago find so amazing. When Eustace Gaunt came to New York he always felt as if he had suddenly stepped out of a coal mine into the sun.

As he strode down Fifth Avenue this brilliant morning, he felt himself to be in high good humor. He knew that his clothes fitted him, and as far back as he could remember he had always had a weakness for becoming clothes. He knew that the cluster of violets in his buttonhole was as correct as it was fragrant, and felt certain that his provincialism was less discernible than actual. Like some other Chicago men I have known, he had always cherished a profound veneration for the metropolis, and even now held dreams of some day taking up his residence therein permanently. The

source of his exhilaration just at this moment was twofold. He knew himself to be cutting a presentable figure and he was flattering himself upon having accomplished an act that he deemed the most virtuous of his whole life. Assuredly his complacency of mood had excuse.

Reviewing his latter course, as he considered, fairly and frankly, he saw in it material for naught but praise. His sudden leap from peril, from degradation, possibly, at the very moment when utter ruin seemed inevitable, condoned, in his eyes at least, all his previous misconduct. He had erred. He knew that. He had allowed his folly to rule him like a slave. He had bent before it—acknowledged its emphasis and its sway—had been ready to lay down life and honor and the esteem of men for it—until it came to the crowning act of infidelity and renunciation, and then—

Then he had been true to his wife.

That thought now sent the blood rushing to his heart in waves. Some men never feel so strongly drawn towards their wives as when they have succeeded in averting a temptation of which the latter are wholly in ignorance. In the revulsion of feeling that had brought back all his reverence for the bride of his youth and the mother of his child, there was room in the Sinner's heart for no emotion of sympathy for the siren for whom he had strayed. He thought for the moment of nothing but his escape from actual wrong-doing, and his joy therein was so intense that he refrained with difficulty from laughing and singing aloud as he walked along.

So vast was his mental laudation of his own excess of virtue, and so overwhelming his reawakened sentiments of devotion to his wife, that he entirely lost sight of any possible suffering that his return to paths of duty might entail upon Imogen Leal. In this very fact, if he had known it, lay the absolute proof that he had never loved the girl. One may inflict pain upon a beloved object; to remain indifferent to the pain, after it is caused, is impossible—if the object is really beloved. Besides, those three little words

had something to answer for. They had awakened a conscience, and when a conscience is awakened, the person who has been responsible for its slumber generally suffers.

And so Mr. Eustace Gaunt, idler and dreamer, fledgeling philosopher and poet, paced down Fifth Avenue that bright morning like an animated fashion-plate, serenely conscious of a heroic act of virtue superbly performed. The memory of all semblance of deceit or evil was obliterated by the precious knowledge that he had escaped the stigma of sin at the last; and he actually caught himself wishing that his wife were with him, that he might look into her quiet eyes and prate to her of his unblemished truth.

He remembered that walk long enough; because it marked the last morning of anything like mental peace that he enjoyed in many years. With every block that he traversed, his exhilaration expanded and grew. His thankfulness for his escape was almost religious and his desire to return to his wife almost as keen as his pride in his own probity. Instead of a solid stone pavement, he seemed to be treading on air. He filliped his light cane airily in his correctly gloved hand and flung away his violets in order that he might purchase more of a flower-girl on the corner, because she had eyes like his little boy's. At thirty, so many lunacies appear rational.

At the office of *The Fang*, into which he presently turned, the valiant Major Plum greeted him like a long-lost son. He lavished compliments upon him and exploded "waugh-waughs" at every syllable.

"Now," said the old warrior, standing off and surveying his caller critically, as he might a horse at an auction, "I must say you are looking fine—yes, finer than silk—waugh! And I want you to make this office your headquarters while you're here, sir, by gad, sir. And if there is anything I can do for you—anything, mind you,—why, just let me know. Waugh!"

"Thanks, Major," replied Gaunt, easily, "you're awfully kind."

"But is there anything?" persisted the Major.

"Well, since you ask me," admitted the young man diffidently, "I'm a bit short, you know, after my travels, and there's something like three or four weeks' pay due me, I believe. Perhaps your cashier—"

"Waugh!" The Major retired in bad order, falling against a glass partition in his haste. There was a whispered consultation with a rather pleasant-faced girl, at a desk piled high with books. Gaunt found the pause embarrassing until he caught sight of a pert typewriting minx making absurd grimaces behind the Major's back. That relieved the tension. Presently the Great Chief returned with—a cordial invitation to dinner. If the young man would have preferred a check, he was much too polite to say so.

"Just a little informal party, you know," explained the Major modestly, "Ducks and myself and—h'm, well, maybe a nice girl or two, eh, you dog? We live very quietly, you know, but we feed well. You'll come? Good! Come along now, and let me introduce you to Mac."

They entered a room from which a pleasant view could be had of the street, and in the course of the little ceremony that followed Gaunt noticed that the Major's manner underwent a distinct and radical change. Much of the assertiveness disappeared from his speech, and the waugh-waughs were eliminated. In addressing his editor, Mr. Hugh McLaren, Major Plum's demeanor was charged with a quality more distinct than mere respect. If the idea had not been so preposterous, one might have pronounced it—fear.

Mr. McLaren rose from his chair and greeted Gaunt cordially. He was a plump little man, with a round, good-natured face and a pair of honest blue eyes that shone and twinkled with rare good nature—far too agreeable a personality, Grant mused, for association with the biting satires for which his pen was famous.

The Major, after participating, with obvious deference, in the interchange of commonplaces following the introduction, retired and left the editor and his Chicago correspondent to themselves. "Well, sir," said Mr. McLaren with great heartiness, as the imposing proportions of his chief

42696

disappeared into the next room, "I am very glad indeed to make your acquaintance, and, if you will allow me, I wish to ask you something. You know I have never been in Chicago myself. Tell me, do these extraordinary people that you describe so comically really exist?"

"Of course they do," replied Gaunt, greatly amused.

"Then everyone who moves in society in Chicago is ridiculous?"

"By no means. There are some people of large fortune whose educational advantages are hardly on a par with their ambition—a disproportion that results in displays of eccentricity on their part. There are also some very charming and cultivated people whose amusement at the antics of the others equals, if not surpasses, our own. If I ignore the well-bred and notice only the eccentric it is because the latter, as mere material, are so much more worthy of it."

"True," sighed McLaren, eyeing his well-kept finger-nails complacently, "we have enough perfect people in New York, Lord knows. To tell you the truth, I rather like your Chicago 'eccentrics,' Mr. Gaunt. There is a breeziness of movement, a defiance of convention, about their actions that appeals to me irresistibly. Is it true that the men in Chicago wear yellow shoes at weddings and the ladies their diamonds on shopping expeditions?"

"Quite," Gaunt assured him. "The bigger the bride's dot, the yellower the shoes. The color, moreover, is chosen to typify the probable tint of the bridegroom's reflections about the time he begins paying alimony. As to the diamonds—well, Chicago women generally possess diamonds, and as a rule they are not averse to letting the fact be known. There are graver misdemeanors."

"And do people really go out to the stockyards and drink ox-blood before breakfast?"

Whatever reply Gaunt might have made to this calumny was cut short in a wholly unlooked-for way. Miss Plum entered the room, rather timidly. She was attired as tastefully as usual. Both men rose to greet her.

"Good morning, Mr. McLaren," she said, with great affability, to the editor. "Mr. Gaunt," turning to that gentleman, "I am very glad to see you. Papa tells me you are to dine with us. I just ran in to tell you we shall expect you at six."

She disappeared as suddenly as she had come, and the editor bestowed upon the correspondent a rather cynical smile of congratulation. "You are to be well entertained, I see," he said, cordially, "but it is a long while to six o'clock. Come in at one and we'll go and get a bit of luncheon. Won't you?"

Gaunt assented readily enough, and passing from the office, left the editor free to receive the several callers that were awaiting his pleasure. In the sunshine of Twenty-third Street he came face to face with Mrs. St. Judas. She was gowned in fetching fashion, and the impish little brown face lighted up at the sight of him.

"What in the world are you doing here, Mr. Chicago?" she demanded saucily.

"Observing a very agreeable picture just at present," was the gallant response. "Outside of the shop windows you are the most attractive sight within range, I think."

"You flatterer!" snapped the authoress with great scorn, but looking by no means displeased, "I thought that sort of jollying belonged exclusively to the Midway."

As they stood there, exchanging quips of this sort, she detected a certain gravity underlying his banter, and her own manner changed with surprising swiftness. She stepped forward a pace, and her tones sank to a half-whisper. "Eustace Gaunt," she declared, pointing at him an accusing finger, chastely gloved, "you have been to see my sister. You cannot deny it! Have you?"

The young man shifted his weight from his right foot to his left and essayed a laugh. It was not a success. "And if I have been to see your sister, my dear young lady," he expostulated, "I hope there was nothing so very shocking in the act. I did not bite her."

The little brown face grew very serious and the corners of the mouth puckered up, even as they had done during that interview in the little office, out in the West. "No," assented Mrs. St. Judas, slowly, "there was no harm, I suppose. Only, Mr. Gaunt,"—she surveyed him narrowly, from beneath drooped lids—"you remember your promise to me, I hope?"

"My promise? Which one?"

"Don't dodge. You know very well which one I mean. It was a very beautiful promise. You said, 'I would sacrifice the dearest thing in life if by so doing I could save her an hour of suffering.' Do you remember?"

"Yes," replied Gaunt, without hesitation, "I remember."

"I shall hold you to that pledge."

"I never yet made a pledge," he said, rather stiffly, "that I was not prepared to keep."

It seemed almost ridiculous to be discussing that promise in such a place. For an instant the spell of the influences that had led to its making came back, and in the yellow haze of the sunshine, as it coquetted with the emerald of the trees in the Square, he saw mirrored a Saint's face, with a pathetic mouth and deep blue eyes. Then he recalled the three little words; and his senses came back to him fully.

"I can trust you," averred Mrs. St. Judas, generously, "and I only hope the sacrifice will never have to be made." She moved away, but paused for an instant to say, mischievously, "I hope you will behave yourself while you are in the East, Mr. Gaunt."

"I never do anything else," was the farewell retort.

An hour or so later Gaunt found himself seated with McLaren at a window-table in Delmonico's. That famous old Twenty-sixth Street eating-house, now, alas! passed into the shades, was then in its glory, not having lived to see its declining days made melancholy by the patronage of theatrical lawyers and shirt-makers in search of custom. It was full of celebrities, and during the service of the meal the editor discoursed wittily upon them. In the course of

half an hour he had pointed out men distinguished in almost every path of life. "There," he chattered blithely, "sits Judge S——, a venerable jurist, whose appetite for his goulash is vastly improved by the fact that he sentenced a criminal to a scientific electrical death this morning. At his left is Senator Crook, who would like to be Governor, but can't, because the newspapers know exactly how much he paid for the votes that secured his last election. Just behind him is a tailor who manages to eat here, although nearly every man in the place owes him money, and just to your right is the man who is going to whip Jim Corbett some day. I can see from where I am sitting four theatrical managers, each of whom claims to have made more money than the other three put together last season, and yet, over yonder, is an author to whom two of them owe large sums for arrears of royalties. The two men of quiet dress and manner in the southeastern window are in society. They belong to the right clubs and come here because they like to see the animals fed. They look amused, don't they?"

Gaunt leaned back and laughed. In his provincial fashion, he had been accustomed to think and speak of "Del's" with awe and reverence; to find a person with sufficient temerity to satirize the place and its patrons gave him some astonishment. He had not yet learned that it was part of the policy of *The Fang* to affect to despise everything and everybody, because so heartily despised itself.

The luncheon ordered by the editor had included a heavenly salad, and the process of its digestion was a revelation and a delight. To Gaunt, the scene possessed the charm of novelty, and he scanned it with interest, smiling to himself at the thought that the waiters seemed even more gently bred than the men they served.

As the two sat sipping their cream-of-violets and glancing out of the window through wreaths of blue smoke—the mood in which men most closely resemble angels, so amiably disposed toward all creation are they rendered by an agreeably filled stomach—McLaren leaned forward in his

chair and said, with some eagerness: "Take a good look at this little man just coming in. He is the celebrity of celebrities. I will tell you about him presently."

Gaunt did as he was bidden. The "little man" was very little indeed, being scarcely five feet high. The effect of his diminutiveness was heightened rather than lessened by a pair of abnormally high-heeled boots, in which he clanked across the floor with much impressiveness, to a vacant table. He had a high, intelligent forehead, this little man, and a nearly bald cranium. A short, stubby mustache jutted from beneath a firm nose, and a pair of keen eyes, heavily lidded, afforded the impression of tireless mental activity. As Gaunt looked at this odd little man, he felt fascinated in spite of himself. He did not know that at a future period of his career he was to hail him as a savior. He turned to his host. "Who is he?" he asked, with interest.

The editor indolently flicked the ashes from his cigarette. "That," he answered, smiling in his sunny way, "is one of the most remarkable men in New York. That is little Jakey Trouble, the celebrated divorce lawyer. Mr. Trouble enjoys the distinction of having been concerned in more divorce cases than any ten lawyers in any ten states. The odd part of it is that he is never known to appear in a case that is contested. As a consequence of this, he never loses a case, and is beloved alike by adversaries and clients. He is on as good terms with the husbands from whom he collects alimony as he is with the wives for whose benefit he so acts. He is the guardian angel of mismated couples, for he can secure them freedom when others cannot. He has undone more marital knots than any hundred parsons have ever tied. Nobody knows how he does it, and nobody cares, but his health is drunk every day by hordes of men and women who vowed marriage was a failure till he released them from it. I call him a public benefactor.

McLaren paused for breath and Gaunt took another look at the little man. "You poke fun at Chicago for its yellow

shoes and diamonds," he said, pleasantly, "and the newspapers revile us for our system of rapid divorces. But this little chap, it seems, ought to make you feel a little guilty on the divorce question yourselves."

"My boy," averred the editor, solemnly, "Chicago's divorce system may be funny enough in some respects, but it can't touch the New York article as manipulated by Mr. Trouble. I repeat, no one knows how he does it, but whatever his method is, it is a marvel and a wonder. Trouble is a daisy. He ought to be put up in bottles, labeled 'Salve for Domestic Woes' and sent to families that fight."

"I think," admitted Gaunt, "that I have seen his name in the newspapers."

"It's a wonder if you haven't," said McLaren, as they rose. "The advertising that he gets is prodigious. He creates so much news, you know, and editors are not ungrateful."

They strolled together down the sunlit street, thronged by this time with smartly clad women on shopping bent. Gaunt's spirits were still high, though there had crept into his mind the disquieting thought of Imogen Leal's physical condition, and the effect that his sudden desertion might have upon it. Before leaving Washington he had telegraphed her briefly that he had been unexpectedly called home.

He accompanied McLaren back to his office and walked into it jauntily, as men quite ignorant of impending disaster are apt to walk. On a desk that he had been invited to use during his stay in town, lay a telegram and a letter. Naturally he opened the telegram first. It was from Imogen:

I order you to return at once. You will if you have a heart.

The young man's face clouded. He folded the yellow slip of paper carefully and placed it in his pocket. Then, tucking his cane under his arm and lolling against the desk,

he read the letter, its perusal bringing him the first serious mental shock that he had known in his life. It was from an intimate friend, a man worthy of being trusted:

"My dear Eustace," so it ran, "I scarcely know how to tell you what has happened, but it is imperative you should know it. I could not well telegraph you such a piece of news, and judged you would not come home on the strength of a mere request from me.

"But that is what you must do, my boy, and at once, for there is sore trouble afoot. Elaine has been to see me and has told me everything. You have been watched while you have been away, and your wife intends to commence an action against you for divorce, immediately.

"Of course she is heartbroken, but she is also quite determined, and I tell you frankly I have no idea that she will change her mind. I do not, of course, know how guilty you are, but infer, from what she says, that the evidence against you is convincing.

"I am your friend, and shall remain so, but I tell you, my boy, this is bad business. Mend it if you can, but I may say frankly that I do not think there is much hope. Elaine does not know I am writing to you, but she told me, if I did write, to assure you that it was useless for you to try to see her."

The young man stood there very still for quite five minutes, with the letter crushed in his hand. His mind was perhaps not an absolute blank for that space of time, but rather a strange jumble of ideas, in which no lucid or coherent thought had place. McLaren's back was towards him, and he looked over his head out of the window, noting, with stupid interest, the precise angle at which a policeman on the other side of the street was carrying his staff. The buzz of the traffic sounded like the thumping of trip-hammers, every beat of which seemed to be falling at the base of his brain. He felt himself to be growing white and ill, and he turned and left the office abruptly before any of

its occupants could notice his indisposition. On reaching the street he turned this way and that, like a drunken man uncertain of his whereabouts, and finally wandered, without any ostensible reason or object, into the Western Union Telegraph Office.

At the doorway of that institution, he once more encountered, fatally enough, the impish visage and smartly attired person of Mrs. Marie St. Judas. She took one glance at his drawn features and drew back with a little gasp and the awe-struck query: "What on earth is the matter?"

Gaunt sank limply down upon one of the low stools facing the window. He stared at his questioner vacantly, and without speaking. She returned the stare, and a glimmer of comprehension came to the little brown face. She noticed the crumpled letter in his hand, and possessed herself of it unrebuked.

She read it carefully through to the end, while the man sat staring out of the window with his corpse's face. People who caught sight of it from the street went away wondering how long a morgue had been established there.

When Mrs. St. Judas had quite finished reading, she folded the sheet of paper with much precision and returned it to its owner. She sat for a moment in thoughtful silence and then asked sharply: "Will your wife change her mind about this?"

Gaunt found speech with difficulty. "Not if she has made up her mind that I am guilty," he said, painfully, "and if she had not done that she would not have told my friend what she has."

"Then, if she sues you," pursued the lady, looking at him fixedly, "the person whom she accuses, in conjunction with yourself, might as well be guilty as innocent, when once the newspapers take hold of the case?"

"Yes," admitted Gaunt miserably. He did not yet appreciate the extent of his calamity, and his reasoning faculties seemed paralyzed.

Mrs. St. Judas gave him another long, analytical look. "Your wife will not wait until you return before commencing her action?" she asked.

"She may have already begun it."

"Give me the name and address of her counsel."

Gaunt obeyed. The lady turned and wrote a despatch. When she had finished, she handed him the paper and said, in tones much gentler than she had ever employed in speaking to him, "You remember your promise. If you mean to keep it, sign that, and send it."

In the name of mercy and humanity, I demand protection for a wholly innocent person who does not live in Chicago. I will furnish you with other evidence, if desired.

Gaunt met the woman's gaze for an instant, steadily. He had read the message carefully, and realized its import. He knew the extent of the sacrifice he was making, but at that moment he considered it just that he should make it. He had given his promise. The exaction of its fulfillment was lawful. He signed the despatch, handed it through the receiver's window and paid for it. As he did so, he noticed that the girl who took it and began mechanically counting the words was the same one who had always received his telegrams from this very office to his wife, five years ago, before their marriage. It seemed preposterous.

The feeling of weakness that had assailed him in McLaren's office had not wholly worn off, but he rose to leave the place simultaneously with Mrs. St. Judas. That lady, however, dismissed him, not unkindly, at the step. "I want you," she said, "to go home and do your duty. I am a loyal sister. I want you to carry out your promise to the very letter. I believe you will."

A thought came to Gaunt as she moved away. It was prompted, possibly, by remorse. "Hattie," he asked, gaining her side with a couple of swift strides, "how serious is your sister's heart trouble?"

She looked at him and laughed. "You ought to be able to answer that question better than I."

"Don't be silly. How long has she been suffering in this way?"

"I don't know what you mean. Suffering in what way?"

"From a weakened heart. Is it absolutely certain that she has not long to live?"

Mrs. St. Judas' beady eyes twinkled their amusement. "Mr. Gaunt," she declared solemnly, "I vow I believe you have been drinking absinthe. Go and take some bromide."

Gaunt looked incredulous even in his misery. "Do you mean to tell me," he insisted, "that Imogen is not suffering from an affection of the heart—that she is not in danger?"

"If she is, I never heard of it," replied Mrs. St. Judas, rather coldly. "You're morbid, Mr. Gaunt. Perhaps it's because of the strain you've been under. I must run off now." And away she flitted.

The young man looked after her in amazement and from that moment began slowly to regain his senses. That afternoon he bought a pistol and for two hours seriously discussed with himself the advisability of suicide. Eventually he dismissed the idea as coarse and took a night train to Chicago instead.

For the first time in his life he was guilty of the discourtesy of breaking a dinner engagement without sending an excuse.

CHAPTER XII

EFFECT

When Elaine Gaunt became convinced of her husband's disloyalty, she ceased, for a time, to believe in God. Not that she had held her child's father in very high or special reverence—she was too keenly conscious of his faults for

that—but her faith in his love for her had grown to be so great a part of her existence that she found herself quite indifferent as to whether she survived its loss. Having herself led a quite beautiful and blameless life, she was unable to comprehend why Heaven should visit her with so dire a punishment; and the blow that she now received was a distinct shock to her religious belief.

She made no outward display of either anger or grief. She was reticent even towards members of her family, and sympathizing acquaintances who endeavored to catechise her on the subject of her wrongs secured scant satisfaction. The depth and poignancy of her anguish she alone knew. It is just possible that her child had some idea of it, for he was intelligent for his years and it was not always possible to stifle evidence of distress in his presence. For writhing, as she was, in the clutch of a grief that dulled her senses, that menaced at times the citadel of Reason itself, her chief thought was for another. She did not wish her suffering to become a source of pain to her child and so concealed it from him to the limit of her ability. Further than this, it is difficult for unselfishness to go.

This gentle spirit, almost too tender and unformed for the duties of wife and motherhood, and certainly too frail to withstand the shock of so severe a trial as this, bent and shook beneath the strain, but never once gave way before it. Mrs. Gaunt was descended from rugged old Presbyterian stock, and being quite convinced that her husband had committed the unpardonable fault, was determined to release herself from him, no matter what degree of suffering the step might entail upon herself. So deep was the effect of her training, and so profound her belief in the wisdom and justice of her course, that there were times when the realization of her own anguish actually afforded, or seemed to afford her, some mitigation of its bitterness—the relief that a martyr under the torture derives from the owledge that his hurts are being received in a good cause.

And this despite the fact that her veneration for all things sacred had been shattered by her discovery that her earthly idol was a frail and brittle thing! Inconsistency most rare, and most womanly!

Her idol, as I have suggested, was not her husband, but rather her husband's affection for herself. The thought of another woman possessing herself of the smallest atom of that affection had never occurred to her. To believe herself robbed of it altogether was a torment the bitterness of which she could not fathom. She had been aware, as she supposed, of all his weaknesses; had commiserated him for some and censured him for others. To her mind, in this discovery of his deceit, there was room neither for doubt nor for middle measures. She had warned him that there was one offence that she would never forgive. She meant to keep her word if the keeping of it killed her.

The discovery of the letter that led to the revelation had been a matter of purest chance. Mrs. Gaunt was not a suspicious woman and had never affected the practice, so devoutly followed by some wives, of searching for evidence of deceit that she dreaded to find. The letter had slipped from her husband's pocket as she was hanging up one of his coats, in careful, housewifely fashion, after his sudden departure for Washington. Destitute of any envelope or other covering, some of the words on its outer sheet had challenged attention in the mere act of picking it up. Its perusal marked for Elaine Gaunt the same abrupt and permanent cessation of earthly happiness that the reception, in New York, of his friend's announcement of the esclandre, had marked for her husband.

To-night she was awaiting, with some uncertainty, the return of her father and her little boy from an interview they were holding with the offender. Since his return, Gaunt had had the good taste to refrain from seeking his wife. She would not have granted him an interview, but scarcely approved of his failure to ask for it. If he could

have seen her face, just then, he would have been guided less by the proprieties than by the laws of common humanity.

She was staring straight into her mirror—the pretty oval mirror before which she had decked herself out for so many innocent pleasures—and the picture of misery that she saw reflected there would have startled her if she had not been too weary to notice it. The sweet gray eyes were swollen and red with incessant weeping, and the beauty of the sensitive mouth was killed by the heavy lines about it. In her attitude there was the pathos of utter and infinite dejection. There is no more piteous sight in all the world than that of Youth in Despair.

She heard the front door open and close, and rose to her feet slowly. She walked to the doorway of her room and stood there, trembling a little, as if in apprehension. She heard her father stamp heavily up the stairs, with the little fellow plodding and panting behind him. The old man paused a moment in the passage-way and then turned into another apartment. She eyed his retreating form wistfully, after the fashion of one hoping against hope. When he closed the door she called the boy, who obediently hastened his steps at the sound of her voice, and she took him in her arms presently, and pressed his little cheek to her own, trying bravely to keep back the tears.

She interrogated him in her own way as to what had passed at the meeting with his father. She knew that if she mystified him by a display of emotion she would place a check upon his loquacity. Naturally he was too young to detect the piteousness of her simulated unconcern.

"What did father say?" she asked with assumed nonchalance.

The urchin had wriggled out of her embrace to the floor and was jerking at the lacing of his boot. "Father didn't say much," he asserted carelessly, "he made me tired, though."

"How was that, dear?" queried his mother, gently.

"Well," explained the youngster, with all the incisiveness of four-and-a-half years, "he wouldn't talk to me at all, and he kept holding me in his arms so tight that it hurt."

"What did he say to grandpa?"

"Well, I didn't hear all of it," confessed the child sagely, "and some of it wasn't very nice."

"Tell me about it."

"Oh, mother,"—this very plaintively—"must I? I'm so tired."

Mrs. Gaunt drew from a bureau drawer a large package of some brutal product of the confectionery shop. "I will give you all this candy to eat," she announced calmly, "if you will tell."

The child's eyes bulged. Never before, in all his little life, had he been proffered the luxury of sweetmeats at bedtime. He was unaware, of course, that there were even graver interests at stake just then than the lining of his infantile stomach.

He grew garrulous under the spell of the bribe. "The room was dark when we went in," he chattered, "and I didn't see father till he hollered 'hello, Billy.' He was sittin' on the window sill, an' he didn't speak to grandpa, but he just took me up an' kissed me, an' he kinder choked, as if he was swallowin' somethin' too big for his t'roat. Grandpa went out an' left us an' I tell you, father wouldn't talk to me at all. I told him about Ruth havin' the sore thumb an' the big dog what chewed the milkman's pants, an' I asked him would he buy me a boat, an' he said nothin' but 'dear old Billy' an' kept on lovin' me. I tell you it made me tired, but I was sorry, too.

"Bimeby grandpa came back an' father turned up the light. I thought he looked sick. He an' grandpa talked, oh, a long while. I'd uv wanted to go home only father rang for a man an' made him bring me ice-cream—don't you *dare* put away that candy, mother!" (this in a loud wail). "That was after father got mad at grandpa."

"What made father get mad at him?"

"Dunno, but he did—awful mad. He kept cool and quiet nearly all the time, but at last he roared out loud, so he scared me. I thought he was goin' to chew grandpa up. *Now*, do I get the candy?"

His mother handed over the package with a sigh. "Was that all?" she asked finally.

"Yep," responded the youngster, with his little jaws champing, "except father kissed me good-night, an' loved me some more, an' whispered to me he was goin' away for awhile an' I must always be good to you. I am good to you, ain't I, mother?"

"Yes, dear," was the ready assent.

Mrs. Gaunt's eyes were moist again, and her hands shook as she prepared her charge for bed. He was asleep before her bribe was half swallowed. This relieved her conscience somewhat.

It was getting late, and a loud ringing at the front door startled her. She ran nervously down the stairs and answered it herself, pushing a servant aside in her haste. A messenger boy stood at the door and handed her an envelope, for which she receipted with trembling fingers. "No answer," said the boy, and ran down the steps whistling.

As her instinct had already told her, the letter was from Gaunt. It was addressed to her father, and, resisting an inclination to tear it open, she dutifully carried it upstairs. The old man, sitting in the library, was inclined to protest against being disturbed, but guessing, by the expression on his daughter's face, the source of the communication, he placed a mark in the open law-book before him and proceeded to read.

As he did so, not a line of his face moved. His daughter watched him with the same wistful gaze with which she had followed him into the room a short while before. Her eyes were fixed hungrily on the closely written sheets of paper, and her fingers clasped and unclasped themselves in impatience. When her father had finished reading, he looked up, and, noting her attitude, viewed her with disapproval.

"Well, daughter," he asked without emotion, "do you wish to see it?"

"Yes," answered Mrs. Gaunt, simply.

"It" had been written hurriedly, on scraps of paper found in the messenger office, and was hardly legible, but she managed to puzzle it out.

It was the letter of a man much overwrought, a missive scarcely hysterical but pregnant with appeal. It expressed the writer's profound contrition for the behavior that had led to the disaster and his hope that a way might be found to repair the evil. "I have erred very grievously," the husband wrote, "but I have not committed the fault of which I am suspected, and I say to you, who suspect me, that if I am speaking falsely when I say I have not, I invite the God in whom as a child I was taught to believe to strike me blind, and dumb, and paralyzed, for the lie! * * * In advising Elaine to carry out the step you contemplate, you should neither of you forget that it is not only I whom you are punishing. You are also punishing the boy. Whatever I may have done, it is not just that he should be robbed of his father. Nor is it right that his whole life should be blackened by a scandal. * * * I think Elaine is fixed in her determination at present, but she might change it if given time to reflect. Only she knows the depth of my love and reverence for her. I can only hope that time will alter her present mood. In any case I implore you both to pause before taking any steps that will add to the hopelessness of the situation, and reflect well before you precipitate a trouble that will cling to us all as long as we live." * * * And more, of course, to the same effect—the plea of a madman, perhaps, and a very vain one, considering the folly of an aim to repair in one hour a wrong that had darkened several lives, but a plea that was at least sincere, if nothing else.

The little woman sighed, and handed the scrawled sheets back to her father. She was quite pale, and her mouth was quivering. "Well?" she managed to stammer.

The old man returned her glance, and his features hard-

ened. He crumpled his son-in-law's letter and threw it under the table. Then, without a word, he resumed his interrupted reading. His daughter gave a queer little shrug of her shoulders—the hopelessness of the gesture was infinite—and sought her own apartment.

Through the windows the moonlight streamed in a glittering silver flood. The child's mother knelt for a long while beside his bed, watching him as he slept. One of his tiny hands crept into hers and rested there, very rosy and soft, and she lifted it now and then and pressed it to her cheek, which was quite white and wan by contrast. When she herself sought the sleep she craved so sorely, she first, in spite of all her disbelief, whispered a prayer for the Sinner; and the moon's rays fell upon the kneeling figure, slender and girlish and beautiful. And before sleep came, tardily, like a miser, to afford a brief respite from suffering, the tears fell again—slow, monotonous tears, that burned and stung as bitterly as if she had been some totally graceless creature who quite deserved her broken heart. And this night was but one of many such. Life's burdens are unequally divided.

CHAPTER XIII

A FAREWELL

Mrs. Clarence Fitzherbert, a lady whom gossips disliked because it was impossible to find cause for speaking ill of her, was tremendously sorry when she heard of the troubles of the Gaunts. She was a sweet-tempered, motherly person, with grown-up children of her own, and the perpetual peace that dwelt at her own fireside heightened her sympathy for all people not similarly blessed. She had known Gaunt as a scatter-brained boy of twenty, and she and her husband had made wagers occasionally on the length of

time it would take him to exhibit some semblance of sense. It was she who had had the more faith in him of the two, and the development of the present situation, while it had scarcely surprised her, had given her a rather unpleasant shock.

Since his return from the East Gaunt had been to see her. He had had a way, in his calfish days, of going to her with all his troubles, and it was perhaps from force of habit that he should have sought her counsel in the first serious mishap of his life. He had of course begged her to employ her good offices as peacemaker and she had made some very earnest efforts in that direction, though quite without success. This grieved her greatly. She was very fond of the young people, and, as she had remarked the previous evening to her husband, "were there not enough uninteresting people getting divorced every day, without sacrificing a couple that seemed made for each other?"

On this particular afternoon, Mrs. Fitzherbert could not have refuted an accusation of looking preposterously young. She wore a becoming gown, and a red rose in her hair made it look quite ten degrees blacker than usual. There was not a vestige of gray in it, either—not even at the temples, where very dark hair is apt to whiten first. Her youthfulness, in fact, seemed to bubble and spring from every part of her. Mrs. Gaunt, who entered unexpectedly and who was feeling quite old herself, noticed it.

"Why, my dear child," exclaimed Mrs. Fitzherbert, rising and kissing her visitor, with great affection, on both cheeks, "how on earth did you get in? I did not even hear you ring."

"The front door was open, so I just walked in," confessed the younger lady, with a weak little attempt at a laugh. She looked pale and worn, but a bright little spot was shining redly in either cheek. Mrs. Fitzherbert's manner grew grave and solicitous at once.

"You're upset, dear," she said softly, "sit by me and tell

me about it." She drew the slight form down on the sofa beside her, and in a second or so it slid sideways into her ready embrace, and rested there.

"That's right," applauded the comforter soothingly, "don't try to say anything yet. You'll feel better in a minute."

Mrs. Gaunt sat up presently, very straight, and a tinge of determination came to the tired face. "I want you, if you will, Mrs. Fitzherbert," she said, with a brave essay at firmness, "to go with me down to Eustace's office."

Mrs. Fitzherbert looked both astonished and delighted, but the delight vanished the instant she had remarked the resolute expression in her caller's eyes. "I will accompany you gladly, dear," she answered, "but won't you tell me why you are going?"

"Eustace," replied Mrs. Gaunt faintly, "has asked to see me, and I feel that I ought to go, if only to prove to him that I am doing everything of my own free will. But I can't go alone. It would compromise my case."

The good lady stared. Here was a wife, apparently on the verge of collapse from grief, on the way to see her husband, and talking of the possibility of "compromising her case." Judging by the child's behavior, the "compromising" of her "case" would be for her the most blissful thing that could happen. The phrase sounded too unnatural to be original with her. Mrs. Fitzherbert felt so strongly tempted to cry that she laughed instead.

"We will go at once," she said brightly, "and on the way you shall tell me exactly what you are going to do when you get there. I will have my things on in a moment."

But on the ride down into the commercial section of the city—that sooty Paradise in which so many vast fortunes (vast even for Chicago) are made with such charming facility, Mrs. Gaunt had little or nothing to say. When she did speak, it was of her plans for her child or of some detail of millinery dear to the feminine heart. Mrs. Fitzherbert watched her pretty companion furtively out of the corners

of her eyes and inwardly admired her for what she would have styled her "nerve." She had seen other women in similar situations, and a mental comparison of their behavior with Elaine's did not result to their advantage.

To Elaine herself, the ride down town passed like a grotesque dream. It had seemed to her, poor child, that since the discovery of her husband's misconduct, she had been living in another world; a very brutal and ugly world, in which every breath of air suggested a stab and every inhabitant was a fiend incarnate. The clang of the crowded streets jarred and jumbled her brain to the point of actual torture. On that brief journey the memory of a hundred events crowded themselves into her mind—memories of runaways and matinees, among other things—memories of little excursions and pleasure-trips before her marriage that had seemed trifling enough then, but which now rose up to haunt her, seeming to cry to her in her misery, "Never again, never again!" Her life since her schooldays passed in review before her, with meteoric swiftness, as the lives of drowning persons are said to considerately array themselves just prior to the moment of dissolution; and she searched it in vain for the record of one misstep that could have afforded Heaven a pretext for visiting her with so dire a punishment. She had not seen her husband since the morning he had left her to visit her rival, and she now felt as if he or she had been desperately ill, or in prison, for many weeks, and required instant succor. And in spite of this, she was on her way to tell him, since he seemed to require the assurance, that their ways must divide forever. Marvelous!

It was Mrs. Fitzherbert who discovered that the required street had been reached. She assisted her young friend to alight and noticed that she leaned upon her rather heavily. They stood for a moment on the sidewalk, jostled by the passing throng. "Are you sure you wish to go, dear?" asked the elder lady, kindly; "will you not wait until you are stronger?"

Mrs. Gaunt smiled wanly and picked up a reef in her skirt with a daintily gloved hand, preparatory to crossing the street. "I'm as strong now as I ever expect to be," she proclaimed bravely, and the two went on their way, arriving in the noisy Board of Trade region without incident. As they entered the building in which Gaunt's office was situated, a newsboy rushed past them, vociferating: "All about wa-wa-wa-wa-aaa—suicide!" Whereat the little woman clutched at her friend's arm and gave evidence of a disposition to faint.

"Do not be alarmed, my dear," counseled Mrs. Fitzherbert reassuringly; "Eustace is not the sort of man that commits suicide. We are much more likely to find him taking a drink."

Gaunt had sent his boy and stenographer home, and when the two ladies entered the office it was untenanted save by himself. He rose and placed chairs for them. His wife sank into hers with creditable composure. After the first glance, she did not look in his direction. Occupied as she was with the endurance of her own grief, the sight of his face shocked her. It seemed to her that it had aged twenty years.

It was Mrs. Fitzherbert who considerately broke the silence. "Well, my boy," she asked—a little nervously, for the intensity of the situation was trying—"what have you to say for yourself?"

Gaunt turned and faced them. "In my defence, nothing," he answered, "because I recognize in advance the futility of anything I might say. I did not ask Elaine to come here to listen to prayers and protestations from me. I asked her, rather, to come that I might learn from her own lips that she wished me to—forego such prayers and protestations."

He spoke with courtesy and deference. There was not a vestige of irony in his tones, but there stole into Mrs. Gaunt's gentle eyes a resentful look.

"That is the way he always talks," she said hopelessly,

looking out of the window and addressing no one in particular, "as if everybody in the world were to blame but himself. I shan't be surprised if he accuses *me* of something."

Mrs. Fitzherbert looked across at Gaunt and saw the torment in his eyes. The sight brought a lump to her own throat. "My dears," she expostulated, mildly, "if you're going to say unkind things to each other, it would have been wiser for you not to have met."

Mrs. Gaunt sat up straight, with a pathetic attempt at severity. "Why did you want me to come?" she demanded sharply.

"To hear you say that you wished, of your own accord, to leave me," replied her husband; "because in that case I should place no obstacle in the way of your desire."

"You want me to leave you. Why don't you confess it?"

"Why do you think I wish you to leave me?"

"Because you love that other woman."

"If you believe that, you will do right to leave me."

It was odd how both of them eschewed the use of the disagreeable word "divorce."

"You have been false to me," declared the wife.

"In a measure, perhaps, I have," assented the husband, "but not in the sense that you mean."

"If you swore to that on the Bible you could not make me believe it. You wish to protect her, and of course you are right. That is chivalry, I suppose."

"Children, children!" sighed Mrs. Fitzherbert, from whose kindly eyes the tears threatened to escape in another moment. "Keep your tempers, whatever you do." Aside, she murmured, "I can't see what good is going to come of this."

A gray, drawn look had crept over Gaunt's face. "It would do no good to swear to that, dear," he said to his wife, very gently; "I took a rather strong oath to that same point in a letter I wrote your father the other night. It was intended for your eyes as well as his, and if it failed

to convince you, nothing I could say now would have any chance of success. Your mind is made up? You are quite sure?"

The alteration in his tone had had its effect. His wife answered "yes" to his question, but the monosyllable was uttered in a whisper, and accompanied by a long breath, terminating in a sob.

"Then," said Gaunt, leaning forward and speaking with all the tenderness at his command, "you must listen to me for a moment. I said I would utter no prayers, and I will not—for myself. You must remember that you and I are responsible, for whatever we do, to our child. Perhaps, on a strict accounting, I am answerable for the penalty that this affair will inflict on him. I am so answerable—yes, up to this moment. From now on, it is you who will do him the wrong if you fasten upon him, for all his life, the stigma and blight of this scandal. You are blinded by resentment now, and by the sense of wrong. You cannot see into the future, as I can, and mark the woeful effects of this divorce upon the career of this boy. He is an infant now. By and bye he will be going to school. Can you not see him coming home and asking you bitter questions as to the reason for the taunts of his little comrades? Account me guilty—as guilty as you choose—say that I deserve every punishment (and there can be no bitterer punishment than the loss of you!) and if you do that, you will still have to admit that because I have erred, there is no reason why the child should be compelled to suffer. So now I, your husband, implore you, by every memory you hold sacred—by the memory of your stainless wifehood—by the memory of the agony you endured when our child was born,—not to wreck his future in the attempt to requite a wrong to yourself. That is all I can say, dear. Answer me."

Down his wife's cheeks two tears were stealing. (Ah, those endless tears; how weary she was of them!) She grew even paler yet, as she whispered: "I can't forgive, sonny. And it's too late to go back now."

Gaunt's self-control left him for an instant. It dawned upon him that his offense must have been black indeed to have inspired this gentle creature with a purpose so inflexible. He leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes. When he looked up, he saw that his wife had drawn off her glove and was placing on his desk something that glittered. It was her wedding ring.

The blood flamed into his face, but he preserved his composure. He waited for Elaine to speak. When she did so it was in a whisper, barely audible: "You must take it back," she said.

"Was it necessary," demanded her husband sadly, "that you should inflict this last wound upon me?" He pointed to the little circlet of gold lying there on the blotter, and turned to Mrs. Fitzherbert, demanding, "What shall I say to her, this woman with the stone in her breast for a heart?"

Mrs. Gaunt hastily uttered a faint protest. "I did not mean it that way, sonny dear," she whispered, with a pathetic little catch between the words. "I did not want to hurt you. I meant that I wished you to keep the ring to remember me by."

The comprehension of her motive, its tenderness and delicacy, struck the Sinner like a sledge hammer. She would not wear his ring, because she believed him unfit to be her husband, but she wished him to treasure it in order that it might remind him of her. Their eyes met, and he found the tears in hers infectious. He rose and took her hands, and she swayed forward and rested for the fraction of a second in his embrace. Good Mrs. Fitzherbert, viewing the scene through a mist of tears of her own, thought for a moment that Love was triumphant and that every one's troubles were ended. She was apprised of her error by hearing Elaine murmur "Good-by."

Gaunt bent forward a little, still holding his wife's hands; "Little one," he said huskily, "I think you are doing wrong, but you know best. I know you are suffering; you can't conceal that from me, and my greatest grief is that you will

not let me try to heal the wounds I have made. Once more—will you believe me—and forgive?"

The wife shook her head.

"Then," said the husband, gently, "I must lose you, but before you go listen a moment: You think now, because you have made up your mind to a certain thing, that you will be able to forget. You will find, the longer you live, and the longer I live, the more impossible it will be for either of us to forget. Men and women who find that they have formed loveless marriages can separate without an effort. A man and wife between whom such a love as ours has existed *cannot* forget. They may drift apart; but the old longing will rise and the old regret awaken, all through the years, until they both die."

Once again Mrs. Gaunt tried to look defiant. "How do you know we have loved—in that way?" she demanded.

"Because," answered Gaunt, swiftly, and with the ghost of a smile flickering about his gray lips, "it is impossible for me to believe anything else. I know that you have loved me because at night, when I have been lying awake begging Almighty God to let me be a better husband to you, you have murmured and babbled of your love in your sleep. A woman may sham love in her waking hours; she can't counterfeit it while unconscious. As to my loving you"—his voice grew deep and passionate—"There should be no doubt of that, I think."

"You have made me doubt it."

"Have I? Then listen a moment, Elaine: You know something of my worship for our child—you at least believe in that. Well then, if he were dead and forgotten—if every one we both knew were to die, and leave only you and me—and if you were to be suddenly maimed, crushed, crippled—caught in a railroad accident, say, and torn and disfigured—then I would still take the poor, bruised wreck of you that was left, and love and treasure it before and above all other women—just because it was *you!* Perhaps I did deceive you," he went on hurriedly, "yes, I did. But I

stopped short of crime, although you don't believe it. And you should remember that whatever she may have been—she or any other—you were the wife: the wife, I say, who had, as you have always had, though perhaps I did not always show it, my fealty, my homage and my heart. Now, little woman, go if you will, but if the time ever comes when you regret, try to remember how hard I tried to dissuade you."

For the space of a minute there was silence. Then Mrs. Gaunt began slowly drawing on her glove. Her husband perceived the action and his teeth sank into his lower lip. In his card-playing days he had been known at his club as "a good loser." He now proved his right to the title.

Mrs. Fitzherbert, looking far too dolorous for one of so sunny a nature, led the way to the door. As she passed out, Gaunt took her hand and lifted it to his lips, with deference. If he had looked at his wife he would have been less composed.

Outside the building, the younger woman said to the older one, musingly, "I wonder if he really loves me—or the other."

"Child," replied her friend, kindly, "if the man doesn't love you more than his own soul he's the most awful liar I ever knew."

Gaunt, when they had gone, stood in the center of the room for some minutes, reflecting profoundly. He presently sent for some brandy and drank half a tumblerful. After that, he broke some furniture and went to dine with some irresponsible people.

CHAPTER XIV

RENUNCIATION

Mr. Robert Lee Romney was in the act of absorbing a very long and comforting drink, of the variety known to the initiated as a "gin fizz." Having quite emptied the glass, he placed it upon the table and gave utterance to a prolonged "ah-h-h-h," of satisfaction. He then stretched out his long legs and thrust his hands into his pockets, awaiting his friend's next remark.

It was a queer place for the discussion of domestic issues. Gaunt had dropped into the hotel for breakfast, and finding Romney in the café, had gladly remained to chat with him. Out in Michigan Avenue the sun was shining brilliantly, and it was decidedly pleasant to sit here and listen to his comrade's words of comfort and wisdom.

Romney was a friend who wore well. Though light of heart by habit, and disposed to view life with the flippancy born of constant intercourse with the sons of rich men, he was able to discuss a serious situation with wisdom, if not dignity. He had shared Gaunt's pleasures and was ready to share his troubles, too. There was nothing counterfeit in his sympathy.

"That," he said sepulchrally, eyeing his empty glass with regret, "is the divinest morning drink yet invented by those suave assassins, the barkeepers. It has just sufficient zest to suit, and is long enough to flush the larynx of a giraffe. Have one, old chap?"

Gaunt did not even hear him. He was abstractedly smoothing the fingers of his gloves and looking out into the avenue. Oddly enough, he was thinking how short a time it was since he had driven up that avenue with Major Plum and his daughter and the palpitant Miss Trenton. Then, life had seemed without a care. Now—

"My boy," expostulated Romney, in his cavernous bass, "do come to life again. Things must have come to a terrible pass when *you* refuse a drink."

The jibe was a ruse for the concealment of honest emotion. At heart the speaker was miserable, for he could see by the altered expression of his friend's face how deeply his trouble had affected him.

"Eustace," he said suddenly, leaning across the table, "you'll pardon my frankness, but do you know I think you lack sand?"

"How so?" inquired Gaunt, turning to listen.

"This much so," explained his friend, "you are making this thing a little too easy for your adversaries. You are at least partly innocent. Why don't you put up a fight, and prove it?"

"That would scarcely be dignified," Gaunt answered wearily. "When a woman sues her husband for divorce, it's a tolerably good sign that she wishes to be rid of him. To attempt to combat such a desire on her part is not polite."

"When you talk like that," observed Romney with some frankness, "you make me yearn to punch your head. Look here—I may speak plainly, may I?"

Gaunt nodded, and listened attentively.

"Then I tell you that your wife is suing you for divorce not because she wants to be rid of you, but because she thinks you deserve it. She wants to vindicate herself. Nothing you could say to her, maybe, would convince her of your innocence, but there's something else that would. Lash out and defend yourself. Fight her—not because you don't love her, or anything like that; privately, I think you're a pair of silly children, who ought to be thrashed and sent home!—but because you owe it to yourself to prove to her that you can make your innocence clear to other people, if not to her. It would never come to a trial, I fancy, but even if it did, you'd win. And by about that time she'd be coming to you and apologizing."

When interested in his subject, Mr. Romney's speech

was not always marked by elegance. His words inspired his listener with a distinct thrill of hope, but he looked unconvinced.

"I know what you dread," went on the Mentor, sagely; "it's the publicity—the row—the coarse comment of the newspapers. You're right to shrink from that. Anybody would. But you've got to put up with a certain amount of talk, and since that is the case, why not have a beautiful scramble while you're about it, and get it over with? You don't want to lose either your wife or your son, do you? Well, then, it's my honest opinion that if Mrs. Gaunt observed any indication on your part of offering a defense, it would start her to thinking. If you made out anything like a case it would confound her legal advisers and give her and your boy back to you beyond a doubt. That's my argument."

An obsequious servitor, at a nod from the orator, had replenished his glass by this time, and a second gin fizz went on a tour of exploration after the first. The world, which for some weeks had looked particularly dark to his friend, suddenly took on a brighter hue. Romney had spoken in a manner that carried conviction with his words. Since the service upon him of the summons in his wife's action, Gaunt had felt as if the world had gone hopelessly awry, and had made no effort to shake off his depression. He now felt as if a chance existed for his salvation. It was possible, as Romney had suggested, that the mere fact of his having failed to offer any defense had strengthened his wife's belief in his guilt. It was reasonable to suppose that if he proved his innocence of actual wrong-doing to the satisfaction of other people, she herself could hardly ask for more.

The two friends left the hotel together, Gaunt in much better spirits than he had supposed he would ever enjoy again. The lawyer to whom Romney sent him—it had never entered his head to take legal advice thus far—was a man of their own age, none too brilliant, possibly, but en-

thusiastic of temperament and hearty of manner. He heard his client's story through to the end, and laughed. "Why," he said, with great positiveness, "no jury would hang a dog on such testimony, much less convict a gentleman of dishonor. Let me ask you—is the very slight evidence that they have against yourself and—ahem!—this young lady, their only ground for action?"

"Absolutely all," declared the culprit.

"Then," said the lawyer, even more decisively, "they have not the shadow of a case against you. I will gladly undertake your defense for you, Mr. Gaunt, and I will pledge you my word in advance that we will win."

"And I shall not lose my son?"

"You certainly need not."

A swift exultation shot to the man's soul. The words brought with them a realization of the true cause of his suffering. A man may endure the loss of a woman, no matter how keenly beloved; take from him an only son, born and growing up in his image, and the sacrifice becomes of more importance. In his hours of reflection upon this catastrophe, Gaunt had told himself repeatedly that it was the prospective loss of his wife to which his anguish was attributable, but he knew now that it had sprung from the thought that his boy must be taken from him and be reared in the belief that his father was an adulterer. There sprang to life with this lawyer's assurance a new thought—that he owed it to the child as well as himself to defend his own name. Well, then, he would do so. Elaine should have her freedom if she chose, though she might, as Romney had said, change her mind after witnessing his defense. And she might rear the boy, too—he would not be so brutal as to take him from her—but no legal barrier should be placed between his son and himself, and when the proper time came there would be the record to show that the son had no cause to feel ashamed of his father. He felt almost joyful as he left the lawyer's office.

"I'll go over to the courthouse at once," the man of parchments called out, "and enter your appearance."

"My appearance," repeated Gaunt, pausing on the threshold, "what's that?"

"Gives you twenty days to answer, and lets 'em know you're going to fight 'em," was the ready explanation. The young man winced at the coarseness of the entire proceeding, and passed out.

At the club, where he stopped for letters and to replenish his cigar-case, there was a surprise in store for him. An attendant, as he entered, remarked "here is Mr. Gaunt now, sir," and a rather heavily built man of middle age and shrewd aspect stepped forward and introduced himself. "My name is Dithridge, Mr. Gaunt," he said, not unpleasantly, "I was just inquiring for you. I am from Washington."

Gaunt gave him a swift look and collected his thoughts briskly. He remembered the newcomer and guessed the object of his errand at once. He had seen him on one occasion, some months before, in the company of Mrs. St. Judas and recalled having heard that young woman refer to him as "a friend of the family." His one glance having now convinced him that Mr. Dithridge's visit was friendly rather than hostile, he greeted him with politeness and led the way to the smoking-room, which he was relieved to find quite deserted. Motioning his visitor to one arm-chair he sank into another, remarking, "Sir, I am glad you have come."

Mr. Dithridge, of Washington, settled himself comfortably in his seat and extended toward his host a ponderous leather cigar-case. When an absolute stranger offers you a cigar he has one of two objects in view: the concealment of animosity or the capture of a boon. Gaunt puffed at the weed—a most admirable one, to do Mr. Dithridge justice—and waited for the latter to speak.

"This is a sad, sad business," murmured the gentleman from Washington, after a long stare at the carpet, "and I have come to see if I cannot help to straighten it out."

"Yes," answered Gaunt.

"I am a lawyer, you know," volunteered the other.

"Ah!"

There was a world of comprehension in the monosyllable. Gaunt was well acquainted with the characteristics of some members of the legal profession.

"What steps have you taken in this matter, may I ask?" queried Lawyer Dithridge, softly.

"None at all," was the prompt response, "until this morning."

"And, if you will pardon my curiosity, what steps have you taken this morning?"

"Mr. Dithridge," answered Gaunt, coldly, but with perfect politeness, "before I answer any more questions, it would be courteous in you to give me your reasons for asking them."

"That is only fair," admitted the lawyer readily, "and I will. I have only one object in coming here, Mr. Gaunt, and only one object in asking you questions—the salvation of an innocent girl whose good name you have placed in jeopardy."

The two men looked each other in the eyes. Gaunt's fell first. He remembered the action he had just decided upon, and his resolution to fight for the possession of his son appeared less admirable. It seemed to smack of selfishness.

"I give you my word of honor, sir," he declared in low tones, "that I am quite as solicitous as yourself for the preservation of that girl's good name. In fact, I am determined that it shall be preserved, no matter who may suffer."

"Then," persisted the lawyer blandly, "you will tell me what steps you have taken this morning."

Again the guilty feeling crept over Gaunt. "I have merely decided," he said bluntly, "to contest the action. I am assured that it can be successfully defended."

Into Mr. Dithridge's shrewd legal features there crept a look of supreme amazement. "And for what earthly rea-

son," he demanded, "do you mean to do that?" (In a measure, his surprise was justified. No one ever contests a divorce suit in Chicago.)

Gaunt's reply was a little sullen. "Not with any idea of defending my own character, I assure you," he said. "I am wise enough to be convinced in advance of the futility of any move in that direction. The public mention of a name in connection with a case of this kind is quite sufficient to damn its owner past redemption. That is a condition for which we have to thank our pure and unsullied daily press. No, sir; if you insist on frankness, my desire is solely to avoid—losing my son. I wish to retain his custody, and my counsel advises me that I can do that by proving what he melodramatically terms—my innocence."

Mr. Dithridge, of Washington, dropped his elbow on his knee and his chin into the palm of his hand. "Mr. Gaunt," he said deliberately, fixing that young man's attention with a stony and wholly unsympathetic stare, "you have just observed, and most wisely, 'public mention of a name in connection with a case of this kind is quite sufficient to damn its owner past redemption.' Are you prepared to see Imogen Leal's name so damned?"

The man he addressed returned the stare, and his face grew white. He began to realize the import of his pledge to Mrs. St. Judas and to appreciate its inexorable penalties. A sense of his impotence flashed across his brain. His new hope seemed to be slipping away as soon as found. A fierce desire seized him to wrestle with his fate—to force from this new tormentor some hope of escape from the inevitable.

"I have told you," he said quietly, "though it was possibly unnecessary you should be assured of it, that the protection of Imogen's name was my first and firmest desire. It seems to me that if it is dragged into this affair, it is at least incumbent upon me to defend it."

"It will not be dragged into this affair," Mr. Dithridge,

of Washington, told him, "unless the other side is forced to use it."

Gaunt looked mystified, but interested. "I don't quite understand," he protested.

"Then I will make it quite clear," volunteered the lawyer, softly and swiftly, and watching the younger man's face narrowly as he spoke, "perhaps it will do no harm for me to admit that I have seen your—ahem!—your adversaries—with respect to this matter, and familiarized myself, to a certain extent, with their intentions. You know, of course, that I am acting solely in the interests of Imogen. Well, then, they realize, I fancy, that their case is somewhat weak, for I found little difficulty in inducing them to agree to leave out her name entirely, *in the event of my supplying them with other and stronger evidence.* Now the question is, can you supply me with such evidence, in order that I may furnish it to them?"

Gaunt looked at the speaker fully a minute without answering. When he had mastered his meaning, he inquired gently: "You mean that in order to save the good name of my innocent accomplice, I myself am to supply evidence in proof of my own guilt with some one else. Is that it?"

Mr. Dithridge, of Washington, bowed.

"Then," protested the young man, frankly, "you will permit me to say that I never heard of anything quite so brutal in all my life."

The lawyer made a courteous effort to look sympathetic. "It is hard, I know," he admitted, and then continued, with great earnestness: "Mr. Gaunt, listen a moment: We are both men of the world, and between ourselves we may speak the exact truth—"

"Do lawyers ever do that?"

"—So that we may admit," continued the other, without noticing the interruption, "that in this entire matter Imogen Leal is equally to blame with yourself. She knew all the circumstances—yours, as well as her own—and she took

every step with her eyes wide open. So, from a standpoint of strict justice, perhaps, she deserves to suffer equally with you. From a standpoint of chivalry, she does not. It is you, Mr. Gaunt, who brought her into this predicament, and no matter what the consequences may be to yourself, it is your duty to protect her. As a man of honor, you can scarcely do less."

The young man's face flushed to a dull red. The black despair at his heart almost choked him. "I do not think," he said, with some insolence, "that I require to take any lessons in the gentle art of chivalry, Mr. Dithridge. When I do, I shall not go to Washington for them. As I have tried to tell you several times, my one desire is to save Imogen's reputation; only I confess I did not think of doing it in quite this way."

"Then why in the name of all that is mysterious?" demanded the lawyer, without trying to conceal his impatience, "did you contemplate for a moment the folly of defending the action?"

"I wished," answered Gaunt, shamefacedly, "to avoid losing my son."

Mr. Dithridge slid back into his arm-chair. "Ah!" he sighed, with some annoyance. "I had not thought of that."

"Suppose I give you this evidence," demanded Gaunt, "or suppose we manufacture it, for no such evidence as you require actually exists—it does away with any possibility of defense on my part; it will brand me effectually as a person without character, will it not, and deprive me forever of the companionship of the boy?"

"That," asserted the lawyer, "is a harsh way of putting it, but substantially correct."

"And in addition to the loss of my character and of my son, I have the equivocal satisfaction of knowing that I provide my adversaries with the material for the accomplishment of both?"

Again Mr. Dithridge, of Washington, bowed.

"And I also gain the ability to reflect agreeably on my

generosity in convincing Mrs. Gaunt that she is justified in believing me doubly unfaithful?"

"All this is true, sir," asserted the lawyer. He leaned forward and added, in a half-whisper, "is the sacrifice too great?"

Gaunt rose to his feet and began drawing on his gloves. The final surrender of his dearest hope left him strangely calm.

"I will place myself in your hands," he replied, thoughtfully biting his lip, "and be guided entirely by your advice. When a man by his folly has imperiled a good woman's name, no sacrifice is too great for him to make to save it. Again, when his wife signifies a wish to leave him, it is bad form in him to even appear to combat that wish. In any case, when he descends to idiocy like mine, he deserves the worst that can happen to him. Damn me if he doesn't."

He led the way to the street, promising, in response to a query, to lend all possible assistance in the concoction of the required "evidence."

And Lawyer Dithridge, of Washington, looked and felt relieved.

CHAPTER XV

THE HIGH COURT OF MARITAL MISFITS

Every Saturday, in the busy season, from two to four judges in Chicago employ several hours in the distribution, to deserving persons, of decrees of divorce. Cases disposed of on these days are known as "default" cases; that is to say, being cases in which no defense, or protest, is offered by the party attacked, the divorce is deemed—very logically—to be desired with equal fervor by both sides, and is therefore granted, "by default," and with all possible

speed. It is small wonder, then, that Saturday morning should be regarded in the light of a weekly festival by certain of the first families of the western metropolis, and that the more popular of the judges should find their courts crowded when the list of cases to be disposed of includes one or more of unusual importance.

In Chicago, divorce is so common a luxury, and the methods of its procurement have been reduced to such a fine point of mathematical science, that the queerness of its features, as an institution, long ago ceased to excite remark among the natives. The grounds upon which divorce may be obtained in Illinois vary from smoking unscented cigarettes after dinner to beating one's wife with brickbats after breakfast; and the cost of the process runs from $2.50 in the case of a day laborer with a large family, to $5,000 in that of a rich deceived wife who wishes to marry again. The height that the industry has reached in Chicago—the granting of divorces, as one might say, in wholesale lots—results in a large influx of business from small interior towns. To "go to Chicago for a divorce" is considered eminently the correct thing in small respectable communities throughout the state; and while the constant and Christian labor of parting those "whom God has joined" is a little wearing on some of the more highly strung judges, the thought of the incessant happiness they are creating affords them consolation and solace for their pains. For, as in nineteen out of twenty Chicago divorce cases both parties immediately marry again, it is difficult to perceive wherein the learned judge granting the decree can find aught with which to reproach his conscience. For, if it is not a proper and meritorious proceeding to dissolve one marriage in order to cause two—to sunder two loving hearts in order to make four happy—then there is no justice in the law and no ginger in the judge. Most Chicago judges, at least, so reason; and from the enthusiastic and prayerful letters of thanks that they receive constantly from

persons they have happily divorced, it is to be argued that divorce is not wholly a failure in the West, even if marriage sometimes is.

The most beautiful and inspiring feature of such a court on a fine Saturday morning is the regularity and precision with which all things are made to move toward a desired consummation. The keynote of the entire system of court machinery is—speed. This idea seems to be implanted with creditable firmness in the breast of every one present, from the jurist on the bench, bursting with wisdom, to the bailiff behind it, bursting with beer. It is recognized that there are many persons present, of different walks in life, and swayed by varying emotions, but possessed of a common ambition—the attainment of freedom from galling matrimonial chains. The business of the day, therefore, goes with celerity. No one hampers or retards it. The applicants for the great and abiding blessing of divorce sit in divers parts of the courtroom, surrounded by their witnesses and awaiting their turn. There are washerwomen and chimney-sweeps, clergymen and soldiers, Hindoos and Hottentots; and here and there, maybe, a dame of high degree whose frequent appeals to her vinaigrette evidence her distaste for the atmosphere. The foreigners among the applicants—for the immigrant population, mind you, takes to the blissful privileges of the divorce court far more readily than to the United States language!—whisper tremulously to one another of the ordeal in store. Honest tradesmen with undesirable spouses sit and twiddle their thumbs while awaiting the fiat that shall leave them free to seek others that are more agreeable. Virtuous ladies with cruel husbands and painted hair smile demurely through their tears at the cruel husbands' successors-elect, who are paying the expenses of these proceedings and await their termination with impatience. Never for an instant, however, does the pace of the procession slacken. The plaintiff, in each case, no defendant appearing, has simply to show cause. The time occupied in this task may be ten minutes—it may be thirty

seconds. In no instance, however, is an applicant guilty of a waste of the court's time. There is a general and polite recognition of the fact that there are others to be attended to, and instances in which the magisterial attention is unduly monopolized are rare. In front of the judge's throne is a high railing, about which are clustered a number of plaintiffs whose names are nearest to the top of the list. Mixed with them, indiscriminately, are witnesses, newspaper reporters and lawyers—divorce-court lawyers of the higher class, whose professional pride would not permit them to accept a smaller retainer than five dollars, or a gilt collar-button. At one terminus of the railing is the witness-chair, glad goal of all, before which the plaintiffs are formed in some sort of a line. There is some crowding and pushing from behind. A plaintiff, or witness, is boosted into the chair. "Yow—yow—yap!" barks a lawyer. "Mm—m—m—m—mum—m—m—m—mum," from the chair. "'Cree!" snaps the judge. "Whack!" goes the bailiff's gavel, and "Next!" hoots he, gleefully, for all the world like a barber whose shop is packed with patrons. Out of the chair bounces the plaintiff, freed in the twinkling of an eye from a bondage despicable and hated. Counsel and friends press forward with congratulations; muffled applause eddies from the rear benches and two or three retired justices-of-the-peace, whose sole earthly asset is their right to perform the marriage ceremony, step up and smilingly proffer their cards.

And the line moves up one. 'Tis a gay whirligig.

A large lady, with fawn-like eyes and some acres of shoulder-blade, asked this morning for a divorce from her husband on the ground of cruelty. She testified, in tones broken with sobs, that he had beaten her with a flat-iron. "A flat-iron, madam!" exclaimed the Court, with polite incredulity, "your husband must be a strong man to handle so heavy a weapon. Couldn't he find anything lighter in the house to whale you with?" "No, sir," replied the fair plaintiff, between her blushes, "I had broken all the other things

a-trunnin' them at him." Unanswerable. The plaintiff took a decree and the Court a fresh bite of tobacco.

A nervous gentleman who stuttered miserably craved the boon of divorce because his wife, as he averred, was subject to "f-f-f-fits." He kept glancing over his shoulder, as though apprehensive of her appearance to deny the charge. "You s-s-s-see, your honor," he explained eagerly, "there's no l-l-l-living in the same h-h-h-house with her f-f-f-fits. I l-l-lose five p-p-p-pounds every time she th-th-th-throws one. You s-s-s-see—"

"We'll have to take your word for it," interjected the Court, "all these people that are waiting will have grown gray-haired by the time you've done telling about it. Take a decree and step down."

Two rather modest looking variety actresses secured their freedom without difficulty upon showing that their husbands had committed bigamy in marrying them, each having at least one wife in another state. Their names and addresses were taken by the several theatrical agents in court and they doubtless succeeded in turning the advertisement to good advantage. The invitations to luncheon that they received on their way out were innumerable. A rather substantial looking citizen was granted a divorce because his wife had succeeded in laming his favorite horse, and a comely Italian lady who could not speak a word of English was treated with similar liberality upon rolling a pair of marvelous brown eyes at the judge and weeping without cessation for five minutes.

And so it ran. To Elaine Gaunt, who sat in the dingy courtroom awaiting her turn for inspection by the motley multitude, the proceedings seemed to savor partly of tragedy, partly of farce. She found herself one moment contemplating with dull despair the ruin of her life, and the next smiling at some absurd feature of the display that made her forget, momentarily, the mournful errand upon which she had come. On one side of her was a stout German woman, with a cavernous mouth and soiled, pudgy hands;

on the other, a weazened old man, toothless and consumptive, arrayed in the overalls of a day laborer. Both, like herself, were candidates for the diploma of divorce.

Her first sensation, on entering the place, in the company of two of her relatives, had been one of resentment—the distinct and passionate resentment of an innocent person suddenly confronted with a punishment wholly undeserved. It seemed to her a most wicked and unrighteous thing that the tender and beautiful romance of her girlhood should find its grave in this ghastly den. During the hour that she sat there, motionless except for the nervous tapping of her foot on the grimy floor, the scenes of her later girlhood and of her all-too-brief married life passed through her mind in melancholy review, less rapidly than a drowning person's sins are said to photograph themselves on the brain, but with deadly clearness and faith. To the snarling of the lawyers, the mumbling of the witnesses, the bellowing of the bailiff, she was quite deaf, and though she smiled, as I say, at the occasional ludicrous incidents that forced themselves upon her notice, she could not have told you what they were a moment after they had transpired. The monotonous procession of mental pictures continued with dreary persistence. At this pitiful crisis in her life, the years seemed to have sped like minutes. She recalled a far-away night in the precious period of Gaunt's courtship, when she had sat in the opera-house at an initial performance of a burlesque that he had helped to write. She had sat by her father, in an orchestra chair, for her lover had been one of a set of smartly dressed but witless young men comprising a box-party in honor of the prima donna. The latter, a bold but symmetrical young person, gifted with a wondrous contralto and a most Satanic eye, had had the hardihood to flirt openly with Gaunt throughout the entire first act; and she, the dainty little fiancée, remembered to this day the pang that the luring glances of the Painted One had cost her. But Grief had an end in those days, if it had not now, and Gaunt had come down and routed her father out

of his seat and sat beside her all through the intermission. And he had leaned over very close—so close that the well-dressed and well-bred people behind them grew mightily interested—and had whispered to her that she was much the sweetest and dearest object in all the throng, and that he would not care if there were a million people looking and listening—he would tell her he loved her, just the same. Whereat she had leaned back and closed her eyes tight, to prevent the foolish tears from starting, and had returned the offender's hand pressure, stealthily, beneath her programme, just before her father came back and the curtain ascended. One of many such nights, was it not, and oh, how dear the recollection even yet! And the kaleidoscope of memory took another twirl, and she was back again in the old barn of a building on the Lake Front, where Theodore Thomas' violins wailed the tenderest of obligatos to a lover's whispered story among the evergreens. She recalled the brave old airs for which the uneducated ever clamored—the Bach-Gounod "Ave Maria," the Handel "Largo," the thunderous Liszt "Second Rhapsody," and the dainty morsels of Delibes and Saint-Saens that had charmed away so many sultry summer nights. There was an old deaf woman in the witness-chair now, and Elaine caught herself idly wondering if she would ever look like her. The memory of those summer-night concerts, with her girlhood's lover in faithful attendance, was strong upon her at the moment, and the sonorous chords of the "Largo" were actually ringing in her ears as the ancient dame, with one withered hand upheld and hollowed, spoon-fashion, to catch her lawyer's questioning, croaked forth the recital of her wrongs. Even the music, with its accompanying pictures, vanished in turn, and there came others, just as distant, that brought this patient little divorcée-to-be some even keener heart-stabs. She recalled the last dear, tremulous week of her girlhood, when all the world seemed a garden, and she the most pampered rosebud in it—when Love held forth to her the golden chalice of ecstasy eternal—a draught whose quaffing

meant, to her white little soul, the dawning of a bliss sacred for words. She saw herself on the evening of wedding, roseate and demure, standing before the cler man in her sweet little gray dress and trying very harc give her worship to her God instead of to her lover. thought of the intervening days—of the little child anc christening in the church before a host of her tittering tearful schoolfellows—of the years of almost limitless l piness that had followed. She saw visions of dro mornings and opulent noons, and passed again thro hours of idle sailing on fairy lakes beneath the benevo light of tranquil stars. And then, suddenly and remo lessly, like the falling of a dingy curtain on a beautiful ture, there came to her a reawakening to the cause of present whereabouts and all that it implied, and once n a very passion of resentment shook her. The coarser the brutality of the scene affected her like an insult. wellspring of her tears was dry at last, but there was ache in her throat and a burning in her brain, each n bitter than tears. She felt as if she had been wronged the entire world, and a retaliatory bitterness towards humanity filled her soul.

When she heard her name called, harshly, by the ba she was astonished at her own calmness. She had herself frequently that she would die outright when actual moment of the ordeal came, but she waved aside proffered support of her relatives and mounted the witn chair without assistance. She had not been seated tl ten seconds before a burning blush arose to her ch and brow. The effect created by her appearance just her embarrassment.

During the ordinary run of events, with the custon array of riff-raff on parade, the demeanor of the divc court habitues had been apathetic. The full sense of extreme prettiness of this particular plaintiff had no so dawned upon them than they crowded towards her ii awesome and lickerish phalanx, devouring with their

her gentle face, her girlish figure, her dainty clothes. Hitherto there had been a continuous angry buzzing throughout the chamber. After the first admiring "Ah-h-h-h!" that had marked her debut, there was deadly silence—the homage of ghoulishness to purity.

Spectators pressed forward with elastic necks and open mouths. The lawyers perked and plumed themselves and discharged whole batteries of languishing stares. Even the learned judge, a wise and upright gentleman with terra cotta whiskers and a nose like a California pear, ate his finger-nails contemplatively and eyed the plaintiff with an interest that was of course paternal.

Poor Mrs. Gaunt, as I have said, blushed. She saw the sensation she had created and the brutality of its import startled her like a blow. But before she had had time to wish herself dead more than twice, she was replying mechanically to the questions of her counsel.

It seemed to her that every word that she spoke accomplished a distinct and separate wrench at her heart-strings. She was perfectly conscious of the tenor of the questions that were addressed to her, and gave her replies with clearness and intelligence; but her chief emotion, extraordinary as it may seem, was one of indignation. She had desired her freedom, but not to ruin her husband, and the trend of the interrogations artfully put by the lawyer certainly left Mr. Eustace Gaunt but very sparse fragments of character upon which to stand. She herself, of course, believed him a rather bad lot, but the evident determination of these abominable people to share in the conviction was unsolicited, and she resented it as an impertinence. She had their sympathy and she loathed them for it. She would have preferred to have them hoot at her.

As a matter of fact, the ordeal lasted but four minutes, but it seemed to Elaine more than as many hours. When she was informed she might retire, a desperate faintness attacked her, but she was offered no assistance. The admiration kindled by her appearance was too overpowering.

Every man present, from the judge down, was too bus speculating with himself on the possibility of having mad a favorable impression to concern himself with the comfo of the charmer. So Mrs. Gaunt resumed her seat, weakl but with dignity, between the pudgy German matron an the octogenarian freak. She was at first inclined to be gla it was over, but realizing presently that life now containe for her absolutely no allurement or charm, she speedily b came apathetic.

She was awakened from her dreams, presently, in a mai ner that she had not foreseen. One of the witnesses pr duced by her lawyer, a half-witted clod who proved, c examination, to be a country inn-keeper, was unfolding story so gross that it instantly chained her attention. purported to convict her husband of conduct of which sl would never have believed him guilty, if the tale had n been told here, under oath, with such manifest hallmarks truth. Hitherto she had believed Gaunt, with all his fault a gentleman. To hear him accused, to believe him guilt of coarseness of this description marked for her the dawi ing of a new line of thought. She still grieved, for her ow sake and the child's, but this last bitter revelation destroy the final remnant of her love for her husband; or so at lea she believed. She was glad her counsel had not prepar her for the blow, for her indignation gave her new streng and courage. She scarcely heard the judgment of her ca from the bench or the congratulations of her counsel, at tl conclusion of the yokel's story, but left the Court with h little head proudly erect, though in the gentle eyes tl weary, weary tears were once more welling. So she w duly divorced, according to her wish, and given the custo of her little boy.

She drove to her home in a cab, feeling dazed and broke In divorcing her husband she had been influenced by h belief that whether guilty of actual wrong or not, he lov another woman. To find, at the very last, that he cou indulge in the commonest license was a shock that brol

her spirit, though it steadied her belief in the propriety of her course.

Being convinced that her interest in her husband had ended forever, she was too womanly to withstand the temptation to immediately inform him of the fact. She stopped at a messenger station and sent a note to him at his office:

You must never write to me, or think of me. I ought to be glad of my freedom, seeing that I can no longer ever respect you.

I have no reproaches to make, only I would scarcely have believed you capable of associating with such people and then coming back to me.

I allude, of course, to your behavior at Ridgeland, two years ago, that I heard of to-day for the first time—God help me!—in a divorce court. I will try to forgive you, but I do not think I can ever forget.

ELAINE.

The irrationality of writing to her husband on the day of divorcing him did not occur to her. She was only conscious of her desire that he should know of her contempt for his behavior. Moreover, the idea began to flutter across her mind that she had from now on, in very truth, a new existence to face—an existence unbrightened from day to day by the benison of affection or the home-coming of a husband. After the fashion of most women who suddenly realize that life is without joy, she had recourse to shopping as a relief from despondency. She stopped at several places, her operations terminating only with her capital, and delaying her nearly an hour. When she reached the house, she found the infantile son and heir seated on the front steps, spitting, with more or less accuracy, at a chalk mark on the sidewalk and twiddling a telegraph envelope in his fingers. He rose solemnly and advanced to meet her.

"Give it to me, dear," she said, holding out her hand for the telegram.

"Mother," inquired the child, with much gravity, "have you been down town gettin' a divorce?"

His mother started. She had supposed him to be entirely ignorant of the proceedings that had culminated in

the comedy of this morning. "Don't be silly," she commanded, a little sternly, still holding out her hand; "give mother the telegram."

The urchin danced away from her, holding the envelope behind him. "I won't, either," he declared, rebelliously, "till you tell. Have you, mother?"

"How did you know anything about it?" demanded the lady, her pretty mouth a-tremble. This pillorying by her own offspring was a little trying.

"Mrs. Harrington an' Mrs. Foster," lisped the little fellow, naming two of her neighbors whom Mrs. Gaunt loved not at all, "wuz standin' here talkin' an' Mrs. Foster said you'd gone down town to get a divorce. What is it, mother? Somethin' good for lunch?"

Mrs. Gaunt glanced over her shoulder and descried just four female heads in the windows of as many houses across the street. The sense of her new honors began to thrust itself upon her understanding forcibly. Her delicate cheeks flushed again. At a third command the child yielded up his prize. "I signed for it when the boy left it," he asserted, proudly, and ran off.

His mother read the despatch. It was from Gaunt, who had lost no time in replying to her note:

> I was never in Ridgeland in my life. I thought you knew that that evidence was manufactured to oblige you.
>
> E. G.

It seemed to Elaine Gaunt just then as if she were the victim of the cruelest conspiracy ever planned, and yet she could not have told whom she blamed or accused. Even in this final trial she was glad to know her husband innocent of this black dishonor, and yet she felt she could never forgive him for sacrificing himself in order to facilitate her separation from him. If he had loved her, she reasoned painfully, he could scarcely have done that.

She toiled wearily up the steps and turned for a moment to watch the child. He was romping in the middle of the

street with his playfellows, shouting with laughter, happy as a skylark.

She entered the house and climbed the stairs with leaden feet. Once in her own apartment, her heart seemed to stop beating. She sat for a long time staring at the carpet, picking aimlessly at her dress with her fingers and unable, at last, to shed a tear.

Her conscience told her that she had done right; though her womanhood told her she would rather have done wrong and suffered less.

CHAPTER XVI

AN ENDING IN SMOKE

The dancers were strung sinuously over the floor of the great ballroom, and through it the music eddied and swam like a spell. The white and gold decorations of the Auditorium, rendered doubly brilliant by the rays of a myriad electric lamps, glittered and shone bravely, and the array of diamonds on exhibition afflicted the society reporters present with acute attacks of calculative mania. The Chicago newspapers, whatever they may have done since, were reasonably guiltless, in those days, of anything resembling a neglect of duty. They followed the practice of printing, the morning after a charity ball, a list of ladies who wore jewels valued at $5,000 or over, as well as a description of their costumes.

It was the fashion of Society to tolerate and patronize these balls good-humoredly, the excellence of their object affording compensation for the expense of energy involved and the inevitable boredom incurred. The opportunity afforded to well-meaning and decent nobodies to gaze their fill (at the reasonable price of $10 per capita) at the socially great, never failed to result in the accumulation of a com-

fortable sum of money, to be duly distributed among deserving charitable institutions. The same plan is in vogue in many large American cities. It is an excellent one. The commingling of classes enables the farrier, for one night at least, to account himself the equal of the merchant prince with an ancient pedigree dating back thirty years; and the money subscribed certainly accomplishes enough good to dwarf recollections of the malice and uncharitableness bred by comparisons of feminine costumes.

If he had not received a commission to write a descriptive column to head a morning newspaper's account of it, Gaunt would not have gone to the ball. This duty he had performed conscientiously before leaving his hotel—a miracle made possible by his regular attendance at previous affairs of the kind—and the only reason for his appearance on the scene was his desire for the ability to say he had been there. At midnight, leaning against a pillar in the promenade, surveying the brilliant scene about him, he found it difficult to analyze his feelings. Such spectacles had always pleased him, but the interest to-night was lacking. The glitter of the lights, the melody from the violins, the flashing of gorgeous fabrics—all contributed to the charm of an ensemble that recalled past pleasures rather too vividly for comfort.

It was some weeks since he had been freed from his domestic ties, and he had not grown accustomed to the release. He had been unable, so far, to accustom himself to the knowledge that he was without certain responsibilities and obligations. In former times he had chafed at the thought that duty compelled his appearance at his home at certain hours. It now seemed both disheartening and absurd to think he had no home to which to go. Some men are never satisfied.

Passing and repassing him were people that he knew: spruce, clean-cut young men—young men "without a past," he reflected cynically—and wholesome, clear-eyed girls, with honest complexions and graceful figures. It was an

idle thought, but he wondered if the experience through which he had passed had aged him appreciably. He was vain of his appearance, and the detection that evening of some indubitably gray hairs had disconcerted him somewhat. He was debating with himself the advisability of seeking a partner for the dance and trying to imagine the last five years of his life a blank, when a rather distressing thing happened.

Coming towards him was a girl he had always liked—a dear little thing with brown curls and meek eyes, whom he had known from her childhood. She was passing on the arm of her mother, a dame of high degree and magnificent aspect, and he was preparing to bow with proper humility, when the older lady, bestowing upon him a look of horror, grasped her daughter by the arm and materially accelerated her pace. The girl glanced back—Gaunt fancied there was a tinge of regret in the look—but the expression of reproachful condemnation was there, too, and the soft cheeks flushed with embarrassment. It was the glance, in short, of a saint who is very sorry for a sinner, but who feels that her condemnation of the sinner is just.

It does not take a man of intelligence long to understand when he has been cut, and his degree of delight in the wound is based, usually, upon the value he sets upon the friendship of the person inflicting it. In Gaunt's case, the humiliation was doubly intense, because he recognized the reason for the slight as clearly as the deliberate intent with which it was bestowed. He knew that he might have led an improper life for years and remained beloved and respected by all his neighbors if his misdeeds had escaped mention in the newspapers. As it was, some of the daily journals had dealt with his case after their customary fashion of picturesque vulgarity. and he knew now that his failure to avoid being found out was to be resented.

This was his first appearance in any sort of a mixed social gathering since the publication of these newspaper articles, and as he had long ago dismissed them from his own mind,

he was scarcely prepared for this evidence of their effect. As he was trying to appreciate the full extent of his undesirability as an acquaintance, in the eyes of pure-minded people, it was further impressed on him by the conduct of three young men who sauntered by. He knew the central figure of the trio very well—a youth in whose company, alas, he had caroused many a night away—but his salutation was indifferently received, and the three gave him a nervous glance apiece as they hurried past. This, Gaunt mused, was a little unfair. To be considered unfit for association with a girl of tender years was severe enough; to be suspected of ability to contaminate a cluster of masculine brilliants with the moral records of these three was grotesque—the grotesqueness being unmodified by the recollection that two of them owed him money. A moment's reflection produced the decision that a catastrophe such as this was sufficient excuse for any man's being driven to drink and he went in search of some champagne. On his way to the café he tried to reason the thing out and was in a measure successful. It was not that these men wished to avoid him, or himself, or objected to his company. It was the being seen with him that they dreaded. The conclusion scarcely brought him comfort, but it softened his feelings toward his fickle friends.

In the region of cups and quips he ran across the elegant and mercurial Mr. Romney. Mr. Romney liked public balls. They afforded him a chance, as he expressed it, to "blow off steam," after the smaller and more select functions that he frequently found so tedious. He was now "blowing off steam" and a gay party of friends at the same time—for the refreshment feature is the leading one of charity balls in Chicago, as, indeed, I believe it is elsewhere.

"Glad to see you here, my boy, and looking so fit," vowed this polished young man of fashion, flicking the wine-foam from his lips with a suspiciously feminine-looking lace handkerchief and glancing into a mirror to see that the bow of his cravat had not crawled under his ear; "this is

what you need. Come out of your chrysalis and show yourself. Gad, but it's a hotchpotch," he went on blithely, as they crossed the passage and passed through one of the "tunnels," so-called, to the floor, "I'll be shot if I thought so many people in town were sober and had ten dollars. Let's stand here a minute and watch the push. I need some one to help me control my emotions."

There was now in store for Mr. Eustace Gaunt a humiliation a little keener than any he had recently experienced. In the faces of people of his acquaintance who passed him he began to recognize a common expression of pained disapproval—the same expression, though in most cases in a modified form, that he had observed in the maid with the meek eyes in the promenade. Some of his friends bestowed upon him the scantest of nods; others, whose eyesight was ordinarily good, entirely failed to observe him. Still others, who paused for an instant to chat with the gentle Romney, either greeted him perfunctorily or managed to turn their backs. It was rather odd; for up to this time most of Romney's friends had been his friends also.

It was not, however, in the attitude of these excellent people that he found cause for mental disquiet, but rather in the emotions that he saw depicted on the face of his old chum and comrade. He saw that Romney recognized the situation in which he (Gaunt) was placed and that he was visibly embarrassed by it, though he was prepared, of course, to stand by him to the last ditch. It was the light of resolute and unwavering loyalty that he saw burning in Romney's eyes that gave the Sinner his deepest pang. It was distressing, of course, to know that he was being slighted by desirable people; it was infinitely more so to feel that he was imperiling his friend's position by being seen in his company, and the evident determination of the friend to accept the peril with cheerfulness and grace only added to his discomfort.

He was on the point of retreating when Romney himself solved the situation by gathering a tarletan-clad nymph into

his embrace and gliding off with her into the whirl of waltzers. Left once more to his own reflections, Gaunt avoided the eyes of people he knew, and tried to comprehend the beauties of his new position.

There was to be, it seemed, an even more radical effect of his sacrifice than any he had anticipated. He was to lose every friend he had, man and woman, and to be compelled, in addition, to endure the scorn of innumerable harmless nobodies whom he could not enrage by telling them of his indifference to it. He caught a glimpse, occasionally, quite against his will, of persons in whose eyes, as they rested upon him, shone the gleam of unspeakable gratification. Perceiving this, he recognized the gratification as just. After years of amusement, and the reams of material for choice paragraphs that society had afforded him, it was only fair that he should reciprocate with some sort of a downfall of his own.

Still, in his position of an Edenless Adam, it seemed rather stupid to think that the moral records of a fair percentage of the married individuals present were so much more intricately arabesqued than his own. He could look in any direction and see men whose lives were a perpetual affront to decency and who were being smilingly saluted on every hand by the very people who were frowning upon him; and as he did this he felt that the penalties of evil-doing were incorrectly balanced. There came upon him, too, a sense of bitter and irreparable loss. Scenes like this —rooms full of dainty girls and queenly women—the murmur of music and shimmer of silks—had been as manna to him ever since he could remember; and to find suddenly that there was no place for him in them, that the public record of his acts had disqualified him from association with ordinary people, was both humiliating and humorous. And, as he looked on, cynically, at the blaze of glittering costumes, there stole upon him a mysterious belief that to-night marked an epoch of some sort in his life. There was a farewell in the atmosphere—a farewell and a requiem that rose

from the hum of voices and sighed from the violins and echoed from the pattering of kid-shod feet.

Turning from the sweet sea of billowing shoulders and foamy lace, he encountered the smiling features of Mr. Eddie Flyburton, a famous journalist with a tireless industry and a perpetual effervescence. A charity ball was never complete without Mr. Flyburton, and when he encountered Gaunt he was following his usual practice of pursuing the ladies of his acquaintance, armed with a note-book in which he rapidly penciled a description of their costumes. "Evening, evening, dear chap," he sputtered, pausing for breath, "great ball, eh? Lord, Lord, how they make me labor! Sent in three columns of copy already—have, indeed."

"Overworked, are you?" inquired Gaunt, with sympathy.

"That doesn't half describe it, my boy," rejoined this industrious Jenkins, with energy, "what with the people who don't want to be written up at all, and those who do want to but pretend they don't, I have a dickens—ah, there, Bessie!" (this to a girlish beauty, who responded with a scornful look but contrived to so twist her head in passing as to challenge the reportorial attention with a dazzling diamond aigrette) "keep me a dance, dear—of a time. These people all pretend they loathe me, but it's a marvel the way they come after me for notices." He jotted down a note on the aigrette.

This was perfectly true. It was the fashion among people of all ages, stations and tribes to denounce Flyburton as a bore, but when paragraphs were a possibility they overwhelmed him with smiles. "Watch this old girl now," he remarked, irreverently, "I'll bet you forty cents she touches me for a mention."

A matron of rather imposing proportions and a nose that described an inverted interrogation point, stopped fairly in front of the agile and versatile Eddie. "Good efening, Mr. Flyburton," she said, heavily.

"Good evening, Mrs. Neinstein," replied Mr. Flyburton, beaming.

"Haf you seen my daughter?" inquired the lady. She wore a tight-fitting corsage and wheezed slightly.

Mr. Flyburton confessed, with regret, that he had not seen Miss Neinstein.

"Its too bat," sighed her mother, "I vantit you to see her gosdume."

Mr. Flyburton said nothing. He smiled, and stood with pencil poised, awaiting the inevitable.

It came. Mrs. Neinstein sighed again, like a furnace exhaust, and elevating her two palms horizontally, demanded, with much dramatic emphasis: "And vat, Mr. Flyburton, do you think of *my* gosdume?"

The question was asked in a tone indicating that any answer save one would be construed as a deadly affront. Mr. Flyburton had no intention of offending. He was writing in his note-book in a resigned way, as he murmured humbly, "Exquisite, Mrs. Neinstein, exquisite."

"You bed its oxquisite," acquiesced the lady, with keen emotion. She picked up a fold of the skirt with one jeweled hand and caressed it fondly with the other. "That," she said, proudly, "is French brokate. Forty dollars a yart. *Imborted*."

She sailed on. "That," said Flyburton, mournfully, "is a fair type." Gaunt found heart to smile. The busy man rushed away.

He himself was turning to flee when he was touched upon the arm by a servant, who informed him that he was wanted at the telephone in the manager's office. This apartment was crowded with fledgeling journalists, in all the unaccustomed glory of clawhammer coats and internal champagne baths, scribbling away for dear life. At the other end of the wire, so Gaunt found, was the City Editor of the newspaper for which he had been writing that evening, who told him, tersely, that the World's Fair buildings were on fire and that he would pay him any price, in reason, for a description of the scene.

Gaunt was shocked and thrilled by the news. Still, the

novelty of the mission appealed to him. For a moment he hesitated, considering ways and means, and then answered back, "All right. I'll go."

The excitement in his tones caused a momentary stoppage of the flying pencils at the desks. Without noticing this, he secured connection with the stable that sheltered the sorrel colts. "Jerry," he demanded of the voice that answered him, "have you anything in that will carry my weight under saddle? The black mare? She'll do. Saddle her and send her over to the Auditorium—Congress Street side. No questions now—quick! If I kill her the *Times* will pay. I'll give you five minutes."

He turned from the instrument. Some of the writers were now leaning back in their chairs trying to discover, by an offhand scrutiny of their friend's face, if he were sober. His eccentricities of behavior were proverbial, but a ride on horseback, in evening dress, at one o'clock in the morning, was a little out of the ordinary, even for him. Besides, it was known to be snowing outside."

The young man's vanity, a quality that his varied experiences had not yet served to eradicate, was pampered by the attention he had excited. He smiled benignantly upon his fellow-laborers, and in answer to an amazed query from one of them, expressed the opinion that any overworked person had a right to a little exercise when he felt himself to be in need of it. He had scarcely left the room when the news of the fire was brought in by a messenger, and a general scattering was the result.

Something inspired Gaunt, on securing his hat and Inverness, to dart back to the ballroom for a farewell glimpse of a scene that instinct told him he might not look upon again for years. One swift, comprehensive glance embraced the whole—the glittering galleries, the blazing lights and the shifting kaleidoscope of color. So standing, and slowly drawing on his street gloves, the conviction stole across him that, ball or no ball, friendships or no friendships, he was very nearly tired of his present whereabouts. Pro-

fessor "Johnny" Hand's geniuses were at work upon a particularly alluring waltz, and at the instant he was turning to go, he caught sight of his little friend with the brown curls and the meek eyes. She was standing near by, with two other girls, neither half as pretty as herself, and Madame Dragon, her mother, was nowhere to be seen. It may have been this last consideration that caused the owner of the meek eyes to turn them squarely upon Gaunt, with—or at least so he thought—the sweet light of challenge smiling from their depths.

The young man was by this time slightly indifferent to consequences or appearances. The generosity of Miss Meek-eyes caused him to drop hat and coat unceremoniously upon a chair, approach her rapidly and, without giving her time or chance to protest, draw her with him into the dance.

"This," murmured Meek-eyes, whose dancing was a poem, "is piracy."

"Forgive me," murmured the pirate, looking down at the brown head against his shoulder; "you were too tempting."

He did not ask her why she had cut him, because the answer to such a query would have involved for her the mental contemplation of subjects with which it is not well that innocence should associate even in thought. She was nothing to him at all, except the instrument of a selfish desire on his part to take his farewell of a gay scene in an agreeable manner. The feeling was strong upon him that he was about to bid adieu to these scenes of his youth indefinitely, and the unavoidable sadness of the thought was softened by this manner of his leave-taking.

Nothing at all, I say, was she; and yet the thought of the kindness of that smile—a kindness to which was added a certain gentle repentance for past severity—tempered the bitterness of the Sinner toward his own sorry lot. It created the feeling that there was some good left in the world. Even the sensation of holding the girlish form lightly in his embrace, as they glided amid the throng, was distinctly

agreeable. It kindled in his mind the rebellious notion of which philosophers boast—that one about there being "as good fish." So it was that he felt in better humor as he dexterously piloted Meek-eyes (who he could have sworn he had heard whisper once, amid the press of dancers "oh, dear, Mr. Gaunt, I am so sorry for you") back to their starting-point, and totally unabashed when he observed Madame Dragon, her mamma, who had seen it all, awaiting their return with eyes flaming rage and powdered nostrils a-quiver. He released his blushing captive and left the scene satisfied. The compassion of Meek-eyes had been most timely. He thought of *Bertie Cecil's* farewell dance at the masquerade and laughed at the melodramatic flavor of his own performance.

Four of his minutes had gone and the one that remained was spent in the café, over a bumper of brandy. The black mare, upon whose saddle the snowflakes were already settling like a blanket of fleece, had excited no little curiosity among the waiting coachmen outside, and when the cloaked and high-hatted figure came out and mounted her, the amazement was perceptibly increased. "Crazy," said some; "Drunk," said others. Both of which charges might have been true; but upon the manner in which the rider guided his plunging beast through the tangle of carriages there could scarcely have been much criticism. Once into Michigan Avenue the mare behaved admirably. She threw up her handsome head as she felt the curb slacken and, gathering herself for the tussle, tore southward like a scampering black hurricane.

Gaunt always maintained to himself afterwards that this wild midnight ride, which in some respects was both freakish and ridiculous, was all that saved him from temporary insanity or at least from serious illness. He had brooded over his affairs until mere reflection had become a torture and sleep an impossibility. He was haunted constantly by the loss of his son and his occasional interviews with the child increased rather than diminished his disorder. To-night

the turmoil of unrest in his brain had reached a sort of climax. He had felt for some days as if he must stir himself prodigously in some way, or collapse. This headlong and crazy gallop supplied the excuse for violent action. It fitted his necessity precisely.

Gallantly the mare set herself to work. The broad avenue was deserted and her hoofs clattered musically on the flinty roadbed. The snowflakes had ceased to fall and only a few tiny spirts stung the rider's face as he swept along. Belated pedestrians on the sidewalks stared in wonder at the man and beast careering by, and a policeman occasionally sent after them an indignant but futile command to halt. From the very outset, it was an exhilarating experience.

So exhilarating, indeed, that the young man's mind rested in a sort of contented haze, marred by no connected or rational idea save the very praiseworthy one of reaching the scene of disaster as soon as possible and properly covering his newspaper assignment. The brandy that he had taken kept the cold out of his stomach if it did not out of his chest and limbs, and the sting of the wind in his cheeks only served to render the sense of freedom more agreeable. He neither knew nor cared that he missed a cable-car by a hairsbreadth at Twenty-second Street, being occupied, instead, in admiring the fine pyrotechnical display made by his animal's hoofs on the stone crossing. And so the mad, jolly flight went on—past lordly palaces, whose few lighted windows gleamed redly through the dark and wherein the potentates of mighty packing-houses slept the sleep of justice if not always of sobriety; past sloping, ice-bound lawns, with their cold stone fences and graveled walks; past wide vacant lots, swept fair and free by the freezing wind (and firmly held at $1,500 a foot—see real estate reports if you don't believe it). What a race was that, I say! And how the rider's brain cleared and his heart bounded under the spell of a frolic that was just to his taste. The mare's sides were heaving and streaked with a foam that froze as fast as it formed on her coat, but she showed no sign of faltering

as he turned her head eastward and sent her scurrying, specter-like, toward the glare now flaming in the sky like a beacon.

As he clattered between the wide-open gates, through which swarms of sightseers were streaming, the reflection came to him that this furious ride and the sensations that it awakened had, under the circumstances, a rather mean aspect. Their excuse was trivial; if there had been a fight to wage—lives to save—it would have been different. The seeking of such distraction simply because mere matters of the affections happened to have gone wrong appeared childish and absurd. The very cause of his unhappiness seemed commonplace. He did not know it, but the dawning of this idea marked for him the commencement of the Flight of Youth. When, in the masculine mind, Love ceases to be a paramount and pervading influence, and the conviction arises that life contains other interests equally as serious, then Youth is abdicating in favor of Manhood and the beginning of wisdom is at hand—sometimes.

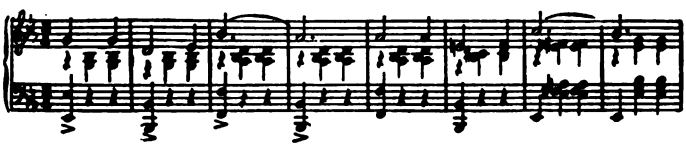
But in the unspeakable grandeur of the spectacle that now rose before him, this thoughtful rider forgot everything in the world save the mission that had brought him thither and the pathos of the fiery havoc to which there seemed no possible end. There may have been sublimer sights in western history than the ascent of those gilded domes and frosted minarets in pyramids and tongues of flame, but if so it is not easy to recall them. Gaunt had moved along the roadway at a swift canter, in total disregard of the numerous official commands to halt, and of the complaints and threats of mere pedestrians who persisted in getting in his way. When he drew rein finally, on the bridge to the north of the Administration Building, every faculty within him sank to numbness before the ineffable majesty of that stupendous scene.

On three sides of the great quadrangle—that superb achievement in the ephemeral in architecture—soared the spreading columns of fire, monstrous as mountains, awful

as judgment-dawn. At intervals, between those flamin sheets, the smaller jets crackled and sputtered and hisse along copings, or coiled themselves, serpent-like, abou stately columns and pillars, climbing and licking and lap ping as if athirst for the destruction of life as well as th murder of art. Round to the east the scolloped necklace c fire looped itself over the Peristyle, tingeing the sky an sending a crimson glow far out across the sullen waters c the lake. Banks of black smoke moved majestically awa with the wind, and through them the wan winter moo glimmered and blinked, the one bit of silver solace in th sea of remorseless red. And down at the limit of the lor lagoon, glassy and mute in the embracee of its circling ic towered Liberty, her sceptre and globe upraised in defianc and her golden draperies dyed to imperial scarlet by tl glare of her perishing domain.

To the man on the bridge, astride of his motionless hor this prodigious and wonderful sight, after the shock first contact, seemed like part of a vague and mysterio dream, morsels of which he had lived through before a that now appeared to be approaching its proper and i evitable climax. Slowly and surely, like the tawdry pri of a toy panorama, the events of the past year unroll themselves, and became photographed, in some marvelc fashion, against the shelving curtain of fire that seethed a raged before his eyes. He saw the birth and passing o tender summer—the dawning of beautiful days—the adv of exquisite nights. Through that crescent of blaze, tl cast fantastic shadows on the chaste white pillars that devoured, he saw himself walking, in the noonday of folly, with a proud-faced girl, with white, small hands, quisite in contour, who laughed in a chromatic scale as s prattled of her early death. The pathway led, somehc to a darkened room, where the moonlight filtered in throu the windows and the very devil stole into his soul in guise of a beautiful desire. Backward the fancy went ag to nights of laughter and frolic, when the wit of the royst

ers sparkled and glittered and the wine ran fair and free. Back, again, to the one night fanciful and fatal of all, when a saintly face, with two wells of liquid blue for eyes, spun him a Satan's web to the pitiful lilt of a waltz—there it was, again! trickling out even now above the treacherous crackle of the flames!



And then on through the remorseless succession of well-remembered scenes—scenes riveted upon his brain by the ruthless impact of incessant retrospection—scenes that contributed, each one its little part, to the humorous spectacle of a Dreamer's undoing. The flames rose and roared, and a great mass of roofing collapsed with a crash, sending up hurricanes of cinders and sparks; and in that mighty downfall there seemed to be typified the height and breadth and depth of his calamity—the calamity that he had never dreamed of dreading, or even considering, until it had come upon him—the calamity of learning he had wrecked the happiness of one he had sworn to protect and encompassed his own lifelong wretchedness by separating himself from his son.

He could never explain to himself how it happened, but there suddenly came to the sentinel on the bridge the first sensation of satisfaction that he had known in months. He afterwards thought he must have fallen asleep and awakened with a new set of reasoning faculties.

It occurred to him that the scene of destruction he was witnessing, and that had now about reached its conclusion, placed an extremely picturesque climax upon a season of harlequinism and buffoonery that was agreeable enough while it lasted, but that had been sufficiently disastrous in some of its effects. The closing of this carnival time had

brought him to a critical point in his career—so critical indeed, that he had frequently debated with himself the advisability or non-advisability of continuing it. This gorgeous and splendid bonfire—this vanishing in smoke of the central scene of the carnival, in the winter of its desertion and neglect—suggested the idea that he regard his entire life as wiped from the books and begin from to-night anew. During this glowing World's Fair period, he argued to himself, he had just begun to live. Possibly the flames that had consumed these white marvels of a wizard architect's imagining would lend him some measure of their purification. (He had been drinking, you see.) So, then, let everything be regarded as going up in smoke from to-night. He would commence again. And, wisest of all, he would go away.

He felt almost cheerful as he wheeled the mare and trotted past the Wooded Island, where flinty sod and festooned icicles usurped the place of gaudy geranium beds and leaf-laden boughs. He did not notice that his feet, in their flimsy patent leathers, were "dead" in the stirrups, else he might not have gone a mile out of his way to ride through the street in which his wife and youngster lived, in order that he might enjoy the sensation of lifting his hat when passing the house. The black mare sought her stable and her stall at as gallant a pace as she had galloped away from them, and her rider, on reaching his hotel, lost no time in describing the fire and sending the description to his newspaper.

"Verily," he murmured to himself, as he watched the messenger boy move away, "I can be faithful enough in the performance of some duties, if not others. I seem to covet a reward of some sort. It shall be hot Scotch."

He had partially carried out this praiseworthy idea—oh, royal hot Scotch! how gloriously glide you down when the heart and the night are both bitter cold!—when who should drop into the café and tap him affectionately on the shoulder but George Scott. This kindly-souled man had a way of

dropping down from the clouds at odd epochs in his friend's life. He himself had been to the Charity Ball, had Scott, and his soul was joyous within him.

"Z-z-z-zip!" he ejaculated, on finishing his salutation; "what a night! I've nearly frozen coming two blocks. Say, Eustace, if that ball wasn't a dream, I'll eat it, and I couldn't eat much at that, after the supper I've had. Speaking of dreams, boy, how's that eastern charmer of yours? Seen her lately? Lord, what eyes she had!"

"George," answered his friend solemnly, "if you pursue that subject any further I shall pitch you into the street. If you drop it, I shall invite you to stay and drink hot Scotch with me, indefinitely. Which is it to be?"

"I'll be good," was the submissive offender's response. "But I say, my boy," he added, with some concern, "you'd better first send a waiter out for a bowl of snow and get him to rub your head in it. Your ears are frozen."

CHAPTER XVII

SWEETNESS AND LIGHT ON AN ISLAND

The Major was standing on the highest point of the Island, roaring at his dogs. His voice was strong, and the animals heard it and came rushing to him. If it is true that a man whom dogs love must have a good streak in him, the Major's goodness was here shown beyond argument. His pets, wild with delight at being noticed, fawned and plunged over him, one enormous black beast with a mournful jowl (and blindly credited by his owner with a strain of pure Newfoundland blood) being especially demonstrative. A black retriever and a really handsome pointer wrangled and snarled between his legs, and a few cats and pups formed a fringe to the melee a little farther off.

"Ah—h—h! Waugh!" growled the proprietor of this

charming menagerie, as he distributed punches and pats of approval with lavish hands; "fine dogs!—fine fellows!—ah-h-h—what royal boys! You're the splendidest lot of old—"

Here the alleged Newfoundland plunged between the Major's legs, carrying them both from under him, and he sat down, with great suddenness and vehemence, upon the rock ledge. "Cuss the dogs!" howled he.

"You have no idea how funny you look doing that, papa," asserted Miss Plum, emerging from the house in a cool white dress and speaking with a suspicion of satire. "Is it not a little early in the day for gymnastics?"

The Major responded with a glare of wrath. With the aid of a friendly stump and the light clasp of his daughter's hand, he rocked fore and aft, like a keg suddenly thrown on its side, and regained his feet. His anger vanished instantly, as it always did. He brushed the long hair back from his forehead, threw out his chest and ejaculated, "Waugh!" Sweet peace rested on the quiet air.

In a spacious army tent, rigged on a broad, flat surface of rock near by, and usually devoted to the bachelors of Major Plum's house-parties, Editor Hugh McLaren, and his more or less capable subordinate, Eustace Gaunt, were indulging in some merriment. McLaren, being a man happily married, had not slept in the tent, but had come across from the house to awaken his friend. Their exchange of greetings had been followed by the human and canine hullabaloo outside.

McLaren, who looked very stocky and athletic in his white sweater and flannels, was doubled up on a camp-stool in semi-convulsions. When he looked up, one could see that he had laughed till he cried. "Isn't he a wonder?" he asked softly.

Gaunt stretched himself luxuriously in his cot and grinned in appreciation. "It makes me young again to listen to him," he assented.

"That man," pursued the editor, with reverence in his

tones, "is a walking electric battery. Such a marvel of nervous energy I never saw in my life. He is never still from morning till night, and he is as game when he turns in as he was when he turned out. And wherever he happens to be, in that precise spot there also happens to be a racket of some sort. It's lovely. Say, get up, won't you? I heard a bell ring somewhere half an hour ago and you'll get blown up if you're late for breakfast."

"Breakfast or no breakfast, I must have my swim first," grumbled Gaunt. He was lazily rolling out of bed when the flap of the tent was pushed aside and a rubicund face, adorned with a bald crown and a neat gray Vandyke, thrust itself in, bringing an invigorating odor of brandy-and-soda with it. The face immediately expanded into a beatific grin and a voice came from the cavity—"Hello, chaps."

"Good morning, Captain," sang the two journalists in a duet; and McLaren added, sniffing the air, "is the sun over the fore-yard already, Captain?"

"Ya-as," admitted the Captain, whose English lineage betrayed itself in the most musical of Piccadilly accents, and his naval training in his custom of timing his drinks by the position of the sun. "I was seedy aftaw all that infernal lawgaw beah lawst night, so I just went to the sideboard and helped meself. It's thoughtful of the Majah to leave his brandy there—deuced thoughtful."

This Captain Clapham, who, it may be here stated, was as thoroughbred as anything human that ever came out of England, was himself bound for the water, being as fond of its use (externally) as most men of his race. He was enveloped in a long gray bathrobe, the precise shade of his beard, and his jolly bald crown shone like a billiard-ball in the strong light.

Leaving the tent, the three men passed down a narrow path through the brushwood, to the opposite extremity of the island, whither feminine visitors rarely strayed, and where, from a promontory of rock, a delicious dive could be had into the cool blue waters of the lake fifteen feet be-

low. The younger man went in with a rush and a splash, the elderly ex-naval officer making a less spectacular entrance by way of a gravelly path down to the water's edge. The morning plunge in the delicious water was one of the undiluted joys of life on the Major's Island. To swim far out into its cold embrace, and to feast the eye on the gleaming blue sky and the dark lines of the towering mountains, was an experience that compensated for much.

McLaren, standing on the bank lazily watching the swimmers, was joined by a gentleman whose idea of his own importance was indicated by his manner and gait. Mr. Cortlandt Ellis, addressed, generally, by his friends as "Commodore" by reason of his fame as an expert yachtsman, was as thoroughbred as the Captain and as American in his tendencies as the latter was English in his. He was a man of fine family and of almost limitless learning on every subject, his habit of blinking his eyes and nodding his head sharply as he talked, as though afflicted with St. Vitus' dance, rather adding to than detracting from his appearance of wisdom.

[Dear old Commodore! You have passed from this vale of sin and error forever and forever, but you left behind you the monument of a personality unwarped and unsoured by the grievous trials through which you had passed, and the memory of your kindly temper and your sunny moods is as green with us as that of the colossal and harmless yarns you so dearly loved to spin. I would there were more men of your stamp among the living, Commodore; if there were, we would have less cause to envy the dead.]

The Commodore, whose one failing was a constitutional aversion to the use of water for any purpose whatsoever, except to sail ships upon, expressed no surprise at seeing Captain Clapham spouting it from his mouth like a whale. "It would kill him to swallow it," said he, tersely. With McLaren he presently retraced his steps toward the house.

"The Major seems to be in fine fettle this morning," observed the editor, as he ducked beneath some brambles.

"Yes," assented the Commodore dryly, and blinking his eyes very fast; "he's left his hen-house door open and let all the poultry loose, fallen over a boat and kicked a hole in her bottom, discharged his man-of-all-work for laughing and had the usual fight with his dogs. He's starting out his day happily."

"Discharged Jerry!" exclaimed McLaren, in wonder; "why, how can he possibly get along without him?"

"Oh," rejoined the older man, with more rapid eye-blinking, "the discharge of Jerry is a regular bi-weekly occurrence. It pacifies the Major and Jerry doesn't mind it. He just goes back to his work and after awhile the old gentleman comes around, as soon as his wrath has cooled, and gives him two dollars. I often think it would be much cheaper to raise Jerry's wages and stop discharging him."

"I should think so, too," laughed McLaren, "but it is only natural Jerry should prefer the present arrangement."

"Jerry," declared the Commodore solemnly, after the fashion of a man giving utterance to a profound philosophical truth, "is the only soul on this Island, now or at any time, who knows exactly how to treat the Major. When the Major storms, Jerry listens and—looks amused. When the Major argues, whether it be on a question of drainage or of mythical fish, Jerry looks pained, and presently argues back, with all the vehemence and contempt he can muster. Jerry's attitude toward his employer, in short, is one of studied coldness and neglect. The Major knows that he is the one member of his retinue whom it is impossible to bluff, and for that reason he loves and respects him. The bond between master and man is very strong. No ordinary discharge can break it."

They had reached the bit of lawn in front of the house by this time, and both men stopped, impressed simultaneously by the surpassing beauty of the scene. It seemed

that the Major had chosen the very garden-spot in this beautiful northern lake country for the erection of his summer castle. Before them glittered the rippling expanse of bright blue water, with a myriad lights and shades cast upon it by the sheltering walls of the mainland hills and the fleecy clouds above. The sunlight was warm and brilliant, but a brisk breeze produced a temperature little short of perfection. On the Island itself the odor of pine-trees pampered the nostrils, and the green and gray perspective of rocks and shrubs afforded a ceaseless rest to the eyes. McLaren removed his hat and pushed back the hair from his forehead, remarking, with much earnestness, that residence in such an Eden inspired the wish that every newspaper on earth were dead and buried.

The Commodore, of course, had a sapient reply ready, but it died on his lips. Major Plum, a fine figure in his flannel trousers and hickory shirt, burst through the front door of his castle like a cheery, fat avalanche and began rampaging up and down the veranda. "Waugh!" he roared heartily, "Waugh!! Waugh!! Don't you all know breakfast's waiting?—a —— —— fine breakfast, ah-h-h—waugh! Don't you know I could eat a whole sheep twice a day in this fine mountain air? Where are all those boys—*and* those girls? Ah-h-h! Waugh!"

The last "waugh" ended in a smack and a gasp, for a rather fetching feminine figure in white had tripped along the veranda and cast itself with a charming abandon upon the Major's waistcoat, the smack being the inevitable consequence of that act. This ceremony having been performed, to the evident mutual satisfaction of the participants, three other maidens, more or less appetizing in looks, appeared and ranged themselves dutifully in a row. Down this row the Major, releasing his first captive, proceeded to travel, bestowing a chaste and fatherly salute upon each expectant face. When it was all over, he clacked the roof of his mouth loudly with his tongue and smiled benignly up at the cerulean vault of heaven.

McLaren and the Commodore, from their position across the lawn, watched the proceedings with delight. "He's a wonder—a wonder," sighed the former, softly, and the Commodore scratched his beard and blinked his eyes very fast as they walked slowly over to the house. Just then Miss Plum emerged from the front door, accompanied by Mrs. McLaren—the latter a strikingly beautiful woman of delicate blond type. The chatelaine of this lively summer establishment was in good spirits, and informed her loving parent that she could sympathize with his appetite, as she herself was troubled with the same complaint. "But dear papa has been up for two hours looking for trouble, you know," she said sweetly to Mrs. McLaren, "so of course he's had time to get hungry."

The Major saluted Mrs. McLaren with great deference, before growling darkly: "There'll be serious trouble if those boys don't show up in five minutes."

"How pleased the Captain would be," exclaimed his daughter, "if he could hear himself so described."

The Captain saved himself "trouble" as it happened, for both he and Gaunt presently appeared and were greeted with overwhelming cordiality by the gentleman who had threatened them. There being no further cause for delay, the Major, with a boyish whoop, and with an array of fluttering girlhood on either arm, led the way in to breakfast.

Miss Plum dispensed the hospitalities of her father's board with the dignity and grace of experience. The wealth of fluttering girlhood was judiciously distributed around the table, so that no man had cause to complain of neglect. The patter of gay conversation ascended like a thanksgiving. Laughter filled the room. Throughout the meal, every one seemed in the best of spirits save the Major, who, from the moment of taking his seat at the head of the table, glared with menace upon a mountainous platter full of chops and later accomplished their ruin with a fury that would have terrified any one not accustomed to it.

Captain Clapham, who, to do him justice, ran the Major

a close second in point of appetite, was bound to go fishing after breakfast, and so declared himself. There arose an instant and musical chorus from the array of fluttering girlhood: "Oh, Captain! won't you pleee-*ease* take *us*?" Whereat the glad expression of the gallant Captain's face changed to one of utter despondency and gloom.

At the mention of fishing, the Major sat bolt upright. "Fishing?" he exclaimed heartily; "bravo! we'll all go." He waved his napkin in the air triumphantly, and his healthy red face glowed with a beautiful enthusiasm.

The word "fish" had brought a look of intense cynicism to the bronzed face of Commodore Cortlandt Ellis. He was scratching his beard and blinking his eyes faster than ever as he declared, decisively, "Major, I don't believe there are any fish in this lake."

A dead silence fell upon the company. The clatter of knives and forks ceased abruptly. McLaren and his wife smiled. The array of fluttering girlhood looked frightened. Miss Plum, at the foot of the table, smiled serenely upon Gaunt, who sat at her left, and awaited the outbreak.

It was some seconds before her father could articulate. When the voice came there was nothing uncertain about it. It sounded as if it were shot out of a gun.

"No fish!" he roared. "NO FISH!" Then the tones fell to those of grieved indignation. "That is a most extraordinary statement for you to make, Ellis. I suppose, if you assert there are no fish in this lake, you mean to convey the idea that there *never were any fish in this lake*. And in that case, sir, how do you account for the thousands upon thousands of fish that I, with my own rod and reel, have taken from it? Waugh!"

A still more deadly silence.

The Commodore never flinched. He only blinked his eyes a little faster as he answered, "I don't attempt to account for those, Major. Nobody could."

For an instant the storm threatened. Then the Major, after his invariable habit when brought squarely to book

on a "bluff," uttered a couple of subdued "waughs" and joined heartily in the laugh that arose against him. The ardor of the general mirth was due to the certain knowledge of every one present that Major Plum had never been known to land a fish in his life—at least from this lake—but to show there was no malice cherished, the host now passed a decanter of hock to the Commodore, who helped himself to a mighty draught.

Plump little Miss Trenton, who formed the central figure of the array of fluttering girlhood, and the roguish droop of whose brown eye Gaunt remembered well, glanced tenderly and timidly about her and remarked, "I wouldn't care if nobody ever caught any fish. I think it's a shame to torture the poor things so."

"Fish don't feel," snapped Miss Dearthing, a rather attractive brunette, who sat opposite, and who had tolerated Miss Trenton's tender glance until it had traveled as far as the Major; "do they, Mr. Ellis?"

"Oh, yaas, they do," mumbled Captain Clapham, over his buttered toast, which had a way, sometimes, of trying conclusions with his teeth and worsting them; "they do, when you put 'em in the pan alive. We never used to cook 'em in any other way, in Africa."

"Horrible," murmured Miss Trenton, with a sympathetic look that was wholly lost upon the Captain.

"When I lived in Labrador," asserted the Commodore, with great solemnity, "we used to cook codfish steaks in the sun, with a burning-glass."

McLaren kicked Gaunt on the shins and the latter controlled his risibilities with difficulty. The Commodore blinked at them and continued, with gravity: "To be sure, you sometimes scorched your fingers—"

But a medley of most diabolic roars and snarls from the veranda interrupted him. The door leading to it was open, and McLaren plunged through it to rescue the pointer from annihilation by the half-bred Newfoundland. These two animals fought, on an average, four times a day, and on

each occasion the graceful liver-and-white pointer un
went a somewhat severer mauling than he had the t
before. The present combat was unusually exquisite,
brought the entire company out to see it. The peacema
McLaren, had grabbed the great black beast by the cc
and wrenched him from his prey, when the Commod
rushing valiantly to his aid, launched a tremendous kic
the snarling captive; which kick, spending most of its f
in the air, terminated on the hip of Miss Plum, who
also flown to the assistance of her pet. The face of
Commodore being turned toward the sky at the mor
he delivered his kick, and the rest of the onlookers b
too busy condoling with the wounded pointer to notice
geographical location of its finish, Gaunt was the only
son to whom the sufferer could look for sympathy.

"That's the only way to stop a dog-fight," declared
Commodore proudly; "kick 'em—kick 'em. If you do
they'll soon break apart."

"Did you see?" whispered Miss Plum, tearfully;
didn't kick Towser; he kicked *me*. If he were to do it a
I think *I'd* break apart."

The brute Towser, cowed or pacified by this time, st
moodily away, swallowing the piece he had chewed
his adversary's ear. McLaren turned to assist in cons
the lady who had received the punishment intended fo
dog. He maintained his gravity well and shot a sco
look at the Commodore. Before he could express hi
testation of such conduct, footsteps were heard approac
around the veranda, from the other side of the house.
visitors arrived and Major Plum and his daughter gr
them with enthusiasm.

They were Mr. and Mrs. Teddy Lighthouse, two n
bors from the mainland, who had rowed across to gai
cruits for a launch-party in the afternoon. The Lighth
were of the landed aristocracy of the neighborhood
were beloved by everybody. Both rich, both artis

repute, and each convinced of the other's perfection, they had good reason to be satisfied with their lot in life.

"Ah-h-h!" sang out the Major, striding forward with his most magnificent manner; "I'm charmed to see you, madam." He possessed himself of both the lady's hands and shook them warmly, his countenance beaming.

"It seems to me, Major," said her husband, grinning, "that you lose a lot of money on those dogs of yours."

"Lose money?" repeated the Major, releasing the captive hands in order to employ his own to light his cigar; "how is that?"

"Why," returned his visitor promptly, "if I had a lot of tykes that fight as conscientiously as yours do, I'd dig 'em a pit and charge an admission fee. You'd have the whole town here, if you advertised each set-to properly."

"I don't know that I like that word 'tyke,' Lighthouse," objected the Major, bridling a little; "do you mean to insinuate that my dogs are not well-bred dogs?"

"By no means, my dear sir," his friend hastened to explain. (McLaren looked at Gaunt and smothered a laugh in the palm of his hand.) "I only said they were great fighters, that is all."

"Well, everything on this island is great," vowed the Major, mollified; "look at that water and sky—waugh! Feel that air—waugh! Look at that foliage—waugh! But that reminds me, I'm dry. Let's all take a drink."

At a signal from her father Miss Plum obediently vanished into the house. This lady had reduced the mixing of cocktails to a most rare and delicate art, and, under the manipulation of her scientific hands, that always insidious beverage became an allurement and a joy. When she reappeared on the veranda bearing a tray of brimming, long-stemmed glasses, the regular business of the day may be said to have begun.

Captain Clapham and the Commodore, who as friends were inseparable, had wandered off some little distance at

the conclusion of the dog-fight, but they turned like a pair of major-generals at the sound of clinking crystal and managed to rejoin the group on the lawn without unseemly haste. Lighthouse and the Commodore were old friends and cronies and exchanged compliments over their tipple. Mrs. Lighthouse, whose kind blue eyes perpetually danced with merriment, refused, as she playfully said, "to be wicked so early in the morning," and surrendered her share to her host, who declared, gallantly, and with perfect truth, that he could drink twenty cocktails from such beautiful hands. When the Major swallowed a cocktail his rule was to slant his eyes gratefully skyward and pat his waistband gently and approvingly with his palm as the stimulant glided down. This time he paid his dutiful daughter a handsome compliment upon her skill, and every one felt that harmony was secured for at least one hour.

The fishing party that morning was a large one and the Commodore, despite his aspersions upon the probable quality of the sport, decided finally to accompany it. The Captain, with a wicked leer at McLaren, muttered an insinuation relating to the generous proportions of the Major's flask and the magnetic qualities exercised by that always well-filled article. To this the Commodore condescended to make no response except to blink his eyes and scratch his chin reflectively.

Mrs. McLaren decided to stay behind, and so did Miss Pallon, a rather wise virgin who had been on these fishing excursions before. Gaunt, whose loathing for the pastime was well known, was not even asked to go, and was therefore spared the necessity of declining. While the anglers were preparing for the trouble, he walked down the path to the dock with the Lighthouses and assisted them into their skiff. When he returned he found another beautiful battle in progress—not between dogs this time, but between father and child.

"I say you *shall* go! Waugh!" stormed Major Plum.

"Please don't be ridiculous, papa," advised Miss Plum,

placidly, and without losing a shade of her coolness or her temper; "when I have said I shall not go I shall not, and it's not the least use your rowing me. Besides, I wish you wouldn't rage like that. It frightens me—not for myself, but for you. When your face gets so red, I always dread apoplexy."

"Well," demanded the Major, lowering his tones somewhat (for this filial concern for his sake touched him, and he was never without a faint apprehension of his own on the apoplectic score), "it's not a graceful thing, Ducks, to slight your friends that way. Why don't you want to go?"

"It's not slighting them," retorted the lady; "you can take care of all that need taking care of. Besides, I have a headache, and you know I hate fishing, anyway."

"I swear," vowed the Major in a terrible voice, and shaking his stick like a war-club, "I believe that you want to stay at home and flirt with that young fashion-plate from Chicago."

Gaunt, who was within easy hearing of this delicate speech, and knew that it was meant to reach his ears, leaned indolently against a tree and lit one of the Major's long, deliciously mild cigars. After blowing a few puffs in the aggrieved parent's direction by way of protest, he sought a hammock near by, and in its kindly embrace soon lost consciousness of everything save the beauty of the morning and the satisfactory character of the rest that he was enjoying. With eyes half-closed and the smoke-wreaths curling about his head, he heard, in a half-doze, the chattering of the fishing-party as its members went trooping down to the boathouse. Soon after that, he must have fallen asleep, for the half-smoked cigar had dropped from his fingers and the surrounding scenery was quite invisible when he heard himself being invited by Miss Plum to take her for a row. "Are you not ashamed to sleep on such a morning?" added the young lady severely; "a strong man like you!"

The "strong man" tumbled out of the hammock, duly abashed, and gallantly denied all desire to ever sleep again,

when confronted with so pleasant a prospect. The two went down to the boathouse together, and in a few minutes were skimming over the lake in an exquisite little cedar skiff, the especial property of Miss Plum, which no hand was ever permitted to touch in her absence.

When a man has been more or less rudely buffeted by fate and has met with an utter lack of success in winning the favor of the one woman on earth that he desires, the circumstance of another finding his society agreeable rarely distresses him. It gratified Gaunt to see himself singled out for the reception of marks of favor by the daughter of his employer and host, if only for the reason that their bestowal appeared to excite in the good old gentleman such flaming volcanoes of wrath. I say "appeared," and it is the correct word; for the Major's outbursts of choler, whenever he discovered a sign of his daughter and his subordinate editor's preference for each other's society, were such affectionate and transparent counterfeits, that they excited in the offenders emotions rather of derision than of fear. For the rest—Gaunt thought little and cared less. He was now imbued with a cheerful indifference to life and all that it contained. He had made up his mind by this time that every tide and combination of fortune had set steadily against him, and when a person of moderate intelligence reaches this plane of thinking, the imbecile ward has loomed directly within view.

This morning, however, the sensation of lying back upon comfortable cushions, with a briar-root pipe between his teeth, watching a generous girl deftly sculling the boat, was distinctly restful. To this arrangement his companion made no demur. It was the manner in which he usually "took her rowing."

Miss Plum rowed with steady and even strokes away from her father's domain, through a charming little channel between another island and the mainland, some hundred feet away. The scenery in this portion of the lake was superb. The water was as blue as sapphires and as clear as a mirror.

Far down in its depths you could see the giant rocks and the tangled tracery of sunken boughs, looking like fairy castles and bowers, with lean fish gliding silently through their crevices and windows. To the right, and forward, towered the stately, pine-clad peaks and to the left stretched a beautiful chessboard of fields, brown with their upturned earth or yellow with waving wheat. The shimmer and glow of the sun helped to make the panorama perfect.

The fair pilot released her oars suddenly and addressed her freight. "Mr. Gaunt," said she, "your conversation is not brilliant this morning."

"I'm afraid it isn't," assented the young man, humbly, "but it is not altogether my fault. I never could talk well when altogether satisfied."

His companion looked pleased. "Then you are satisfied now?" she asked gently.

"I would be hard to please if I were not," declared Gaunt, lazily. "I feel like your father—'this air—waugh!—this water—waugh!—this everything—waugh!' I would be a churl, indeed, if I craved anything else."

Miss Plum laughed. The mimicking of her father was perfect, and she forgave Gaunt for it because she knew he was fond of him. "Am I included in the 'everything—waugh!'" was her next question.

"No," replied the young man dutifully; "you are an influence separate and distinct, and of course more charming than all the rest put together. It is your presence that makes the other attractions—satisfying."

"I see. You mean I am a sort of finishing touch—like the suspicion of garlic in a salad. I am flattered."

"Heavens!" expostulated Gaunt, sitting up; "amid such scenery, what sacrilege to even think of something that one eats!"

"I didn't consider that," admitted the lady; "you see I am used to the scenery. But while I think of it, Sir Aesthete, I believe you punished a very fair breakfast yourself this morning."

"Yes," admitted Gaunt sadly; "it's a painful fact that v are all compelled to eat. Even poets do it—when they c afford to. But who, my dear young lady, could sit at t same table with your worthy papa, and not catch from h the infection of that matchless appetite? You, surely, ou not to reproach me with having done so."

"There's a good deal in that," assented Miss Pl gravely. "My father is a champion in that respect, I o At mealtimes he makes me think of a Mohammedan at prayers. He's so very devout. I suppose that's wher get my robust appetite." She looked about her and ask "Where shall I row to now?"

"Nowhere," was the prompt reply; "this atmosphere one in which exertion of any sort is a crime. Let's dri

As he settled himself in his cushions he received a sear ing look. It was accompanied by the spoken query, "Wh to?"

"It doesn't matter," asserted the young man, sleep from beneath the brim of his hat; "I'm just in the hur not to care a button where I drift."

In an hour or so they were possibly a mile from la when, with the suddenness for which that climate is famc rain began to fall. The indolent "strong man" once m emerged from his doze. "What shall we do?" he manded. "I can't change places with you. The boat wc upset. And it's too far for you to row in."

"Seeing there is no help for it," answered Miss Pl placidly, "we might as well sit here and get wet. We wc be drenched, in any event, long before we could re shelter."

There was something heroic in the manner in which Major's daughter sat in her boat and watched the ra demolition of a becoming effect in summer toilets. wore a flimsy shirtwaist and a duck skirt. It was a del rather than a shower and in three minutes she was w her father would have called "a sight." Gaunt forgot, in

sympathy, the miserable wreck of his own cherished white trousers, drenched and bedraggled.

"What a shame!" exclaimed he.

"Why should we care?" queried the undaunted victim, blithely; "it isn't nearly as bad as if we had fallen overboard."

The capricious sun came out again, and the rain ceased almost immediately. A superb rainbow had bent itself across the sky. To the man, the situation was anything but romantic. He was shivering like a condemned Chinaman.

His companion in misfortune read his thought and responded to it. He saw that she was holding her hands behind her playfully, and was curious. When she handed him the flask—a pretty silver trifle—curiosity gave place to enthusiasm. After helping the donor, he took a generous draught and ejaculated in a heartfelt fashion, "Miss Plum, you have saved my life."

"I believe, Mr. Gaunt," vowed the lady archly, "that you only like me just after you have taken a drink."

Around a bend of the rocks in the distance danced a tiny white speck. It presently grew larger. After a careful observation of its approach, the Major's daughter sighed and remarked, with resignation, "There comes the fishing-party. Our pleasant morning is finished, I fear."

Gaunt sighed also. By the time the smart little naphtha launch came scurrying alongside he felt fortified.

"What in thunder are you doing here?" roared the warrior-commander, over the side. He was quite red in the face and it was easy to surmise he had caught no fish.

"Hanging ourselves out to dry, dear; can't you see?" answered his daughter affectionately; "it was a little damp awhile ago; didn't you feel it?"

An inarticulate growl was the response. Gaunt, who had lit another of the old gentleman's cigars by this time, had resumed his lolling on his cushion and managed to make

his attitude of indolence look as impudent as possible. H felt the strength of the Major's glare upon him and, bein thoroughly conscious of the fictitious nature of the wra contained therein, grinned amiably back at him in retur "Get any fish?" he drawled, languidly.

"*Fish!*" bellowed the white-bearded warrior, savage "FISH!! — — — — —!! If any blasted ass says fish me, Ill—"

At this point the man Jerry, who usually consulted l own inclinations with respect to the movements of the lit ship, regardless of her skipper's wishes, became convinc that the latter had talked long enough. He suddenly put the power, and away she darted, leaving a thin white trail foam in her wake and the Major still leaning over the si denouncing creation. After this encounter, his daughte spirits appeared to droop. With some difficulty and ri Gaunt managed to exchange seats with her and relieve h of the task of rowing. The exercise took the stiffness c of his joints and he pulled, with swift, vigorous strok back over the deep, still water, with its smiling blue su face and its caverns of rocks and boughs below, back to t island, where neither man nor maid was surprised to see t imposing figure of the Major planted pompously on t dock awaiting their approach. There then ensued the t angular interchange of courtesies that was the comm climax of such occasions and that would have surprised a disappointed all participants by failing to come to pass.

Major Plum (with inconceivable fury): "Daughter, wl the blazes—waugh!—does this mean? Waugh!"

Miss Plum (resignedly): "That I'm rather tired, pa and I wish you wouldn't shout at me like that. It mal my head ache."

Gaunt (springing to the dock and assisting the lady disembark): "What's the matter, Major?"

Major Plum: "Mmm—um—um—m—ooarr!!! Dau ter, how can you persist in disobeying me? You ought be ashamed of yourself. Waugh!"

Miss Plum (icily): "I am sure I don't know what you mean, papa."

Gaunt (with dignity): "If I am to blame for anything that has displeased you, sir, I am very sorry. It shall not occur again if I can help it. Miss Plum, I am indebted to you for a most agreeable morning."

Miss Plum (as her escort retires up the path): "Papa, you are the rudest man I ever knew."

Major Plum (in amazement): "Why—why—wha—aa—at have I done?"

Miss Plum (brokenly): "You have made me very unhappy."

Major Plum (weakening visibly): "Well, I'll soon be dead and gone and then you won't have any one to abuse." (More weakly still) "Waugh!"

Miss Plum (quite melted): "Papa!"

Major Plum (blubbering outright): "Ducks!" (The usual embrace. And curtain.)

CHAPTER XVIII

A LITTLE MORE OF THE SAME

At luncheon, no great degree of hilarity reigned, at least among the ladies. Mrs. McLaren, pleading a headache, did not appear, and the array of fluttering girlhood lacked effervescence, no two of its members having returned from the fishing excursion on speaking terms. Miss Plum had not wholly forgiven her father for the exhibition on the dock and their relations were strained in consequence.

If, indeed, it had not been for Captain Clapham, there might have been no amusement whatever for the more observant members of the party. The Captain, who had been assisting Commodore Ellis in the task of drowning recollection of the scarcity of fish, approached the house, at the

clang of the gong, in an uncertain fashion, as if he were trying to lift both feet at once. His eyes, none too clear-sighted at best, were fixed immovably on the doorway through which he meant to steer, and as a consequence he plowed unsmoothly over a raised flower-bed, without benefit to some nice asters and geraniums. He stumbled upon two of the dogs that were wrangling over a bone in front of the house, and in stooping to pat one of them on the head, shot forward and barked his shins severely against the steps. "Starboard, Captain, starboard!" bawled the Commodore, following with his own feet crossed and his eyes a-blink, "easy now, to sta'bbo-rd. I'm hard astern and sailing close-hauled;" and the Captain, heeding the advice, described but one half-moon in crossing the veranda, entered the hall and sank into his chair with a smile of pride in the skill of his performance. The Commodore's entrance was even more graceful, and when he sat down and began gravely to pepper his bouillon with horse-radish, McLaren, busy with his fish, kicked his assistant's long-suffering legs once more beneath the table and the twain hugged themselves in their enjoyment.

Beneath the benign influence of the claret, some tongues were loosened and plans for the afternoon discussed. In addition to the launch-party of the Lighthouses there was a baseball game in the village to be considered, besides other attractions. The Major promptly vowed he would participate in that baseball game if the Lord permitted him to live long enough to get to the scene of trouble. "Well, and why shouldn't I play ball?" he demanded wrathfully, marking the interrogation points on the faces of certain of his guests; "perhaps you think I can't run?"

The Commodore was scratching his chin. "Why should I think that?" asked he, "when I was in the army with you?"

"Ho! Ho! Ho!" roared the King of the Island, cheerily, "very good, very good!" His sides shook with honest

merriment as he poured himself a liqueur. He had scarcely swallowed it before there arose in the neighborhood of the kitchen a clatter loud enough to wake the dead—the barking of dogs, the squawking of hens and above it all the ear-piercing screams of a pig or of a woman—perhaps both.

The Captain, who had emptied a decanter and was very happy, winked across the table at Miss Dearthing. "I thought," he observed, gently, "that it was time for another dawg-fight."

The Major was struggling to his feet with the idea of going to investigate, when the man-of-all-work entered the dining-room, abruptly, with his hat on his head and contempt in his face. He paused before the Major. "Well, you done it," he remarked decisively.

His master looked uneasy. "What have I done now?" he demanded.

"Oh, not much," replied Jerry, with exquisite satire; "when you went to look at the pigs you left down the bars. Towser chased one of 'em into the kitchen an' it upset a pail of boiling water over the cook's feet an' lowped through the window. No; you ain't done much." This last very bitterly.

"Jerry," said the Major, with the stony calmness of immeasurable wrath, "I told you weeks ago to hobble those pigs. You are discharged, finally, and once for all. When I go to town I will send you a check."

"Certified?" asked Jerry.

During the laugh that followed he got safely away. "You're doing beautifully to-day, dear," declared Miss Plum, addressing her father; "you owe my old Sukey a new gown for that last performance." She rose as she spoke. "Suppose we have our coffee out on the veranda. It's so much cooler out there."

The languor of mid-day and the influence of his repast served to eradicate the baseball idea from the Major's active brain, and he soon settled himself to a game of whist with

his daughter and Miss Pallon, both of whom were experts Gaunt, who played vilely, being complimented with an in vitation to take the fourth hand.

When the whistle of the Lighthouses' launch was hear blowing at the dock, only the McLarens and the flut tering girlhood were left, the Commodore and Captai Clapham having escaped to the mainland in a rowboat, ben on seeing a mountain game of ball. Miss Trenton and Mis Dearthing, seeing their host comfortably established be yond the conversational reach of either, became friend again in self-defence and went a-sailing in something lik harmony. McLaren had a keen admiration for Lighthous and his wife, and embarked on the water-trip with enthus iasm. So the Island suddenly became very quiet. Eve the dogs, profiting by their master's example, inaugurate a season for the avoidance of riot, and lay down to sleep i the sun.

This little village that nestled at the edge of the loft chain of hills, on the very borders of the lake, was an inter esting spot, if only by reason of the character of its inhab itants. Cortlandt Ellis, who had spent portions of man summers in the neighborhood, was wont to declare that th average native of Hilltown had but two clear ideas dominat ing his scheme of existence: The pillaging of the summe resident on week-days and the adjustment of his accour with Heaven on Sunday. The men were a race of brawn sunburned giants whose large joints and shambling ga were things due, more or less, to long service as guide afloat and ashore. It was a feature of life in the place th the guides were, as a rule, the only persons who ever caugl fish; the inference being, so the truthful Commodor claimed, that they carefully kept their patrons away fro the likely spots, in order that they might preserve the reall profitable sport for themselves. For while a guide woul never guarantee, to the person employing his services, th capture of any specific quantity of fish or game, in their se son, it was noticeable that he always had plenty of both f

sale. Amateurs frequently took advantage of this. The women formed an element of the population rarely seen, except at church on Sundays or in the back yards of their cottages, hanging out the clothes. Their time was devoted to the rearing of children and the dissemination of the village news—two harmless pastimes, in the pursuit of which they were equally energetic. The village itself was a deliciously dreamy, if not romantic, place. To the stranger, it looked as if it might have sprung up at the foot of the hills in a single night, hundreds of years ago, and remained forgotten by the rest of the universe ever since.

The journey to the mainland this afternoon of the two old salts was remarkable for nothing except the great enjoyment they contrived to extract from the experience. Captain Clapham, while a fairly good shot (as, indeed, are most Englishmen), was not an adept with the oars, and some time before their boat reached the landing-stage the Commodore had exhausted both his muscles and his breath, the latter with giving directions and the former with his efforts to counteract the effect of his companion's irregular pulling. The Captain rowed very much as he talked—languidly and in jerks—which is trying to the other man in the boat, when he seeks to maintain an even, powerful stroke. They reached the mainland without mishap, however.

The narrow road that ran along the lake to the village of Hilltown proper was punctuated at intervals with quaint little hotels—wooden structures, painted in most cases a dazzling white and edged with wide verandas upon which summer boarders lolled and perspired. The Captain and the Commodore, as they went striding by, were viewed by these commoners with critical interest—an attention that always befell stray visitors from the Major's island. When they reached the last hotel of the line, the only one permitted by the law of the place to dispense cheering liquids, and in front of which the baseball game was even then in progress, the gallant Captain's tongue was protruding and his knees knocking together weakly. The landlord, who

had seen him coming, advanced to the rescue with a mill punch, and disaster was averted.

There was nothing extraordinary about the game itsell except, possibly, the hideous extravagance with which th natives wagered dimes and quarters on its result. It al forded these two distinguished New Yorkers, however, a opportunity for restful study of the exertions of others an for a conscientious replenishing, from time to time, of th worthy landlord's exchequer. The Commodore seated hin self in a comfortable chair on the hotel porch and discourse with great fluency, and with a total lack of reason or (knowledge, on the fine points of the contest. The Captai listened with deep respect, only interrupting his friend : such intervals as the sun, according to his judgmen appeared to be "over the fore-yard," at which signal tl landlord would promptly rise and do his duty. So veh ment, indeed, were the Commodore's comments and eluc dations, that when the match broke up in the inevitab fight, the side that got the worst of it unanimously appeal to him for an opinion as to the conduct of the opposi party. Whereupon the Commodore, with his most judici manner, and with much blinking, gravely announced th only insane people played baseball on such a day, anyho and that those who permitted themselves to be licked, eith in the game or in the free fight that formed its logical co clusion, deserved to go to jail on general principles. Tl decision so vastly tickled the Captain that he began to sni ger gently, and continued so to do until some lusty urchin taking offence thereat, began to pelt him with sods. Th caused the sun, from the Captain's point of view, to mou the fore-yard and remain there permanently; for he forsoc the Commodore (who had received only a sprinkling fro the rain of turf), and sought the cellar, or basement, of tl hotel, where he could certainly see less, but where he h the advantage of closer contiguity to the source of supplie

By the time the afternoon had waned, and the landlo had begun to entertain the idea of telephoning to the neare

distillery for help, the two amiable old boys decided that it would be inexpedient to wait there another week for the next baseball game, and started on the return journey. On the way to the dock where they had made fast their boat the Captain's locomotion was a little uncertain. He had a way of stubbing his right toes against his left heel that served neither to accelerate his pace nor to heighten the dignity of his movements. The Commodore, who could generally travel on an even keel under anything like a reasonable cargo, helped his shipmate along with encouraging words. "Steady in the wind's eye," he admonished loudly, as his convoy evinced an inclination to veer to port on the edge of a miniature precipice that would have given him a drop of twenty feet into the lake. "Steady she is!" sang out the Captain bravely, jibing with prompt obedience and escaping the peril. And then the two old sea-dogs, joying in the interested looks cast upon them by the bevy of boarders awaiting the dinner-bell on the piazza of the hotel they happened to be passing, and in the sheer exuberance of good feeling, broke into a stave of the Commodore's favorite song:

From starboard to larboard away we go!
(Heave-ho! Roll a man down!)
From sta'bbo'd to la'bbo'd away we go—
(Give us time, give us time to roll a man down!)

The Captain, to be sure, was a bit wheezy in the upper register, but the Commodore helped out finely with his mellow "Roll a man down," and a more instructive spectacle than that cut by the amiable pair, as they stood on the dock embracing each other fondly before embarking, could not well be imagined. They got into their boat very creditably and would doubtless have made headway at once if they had not both forgotten to loose the painter. The Captain, at a gruff order from the Commodore, managed to wabble out and remedy the oversight; after which he wabbled in again (somewhat sulkily, for as an ex-naval officer he

did not altogether like submitting to orders from a civilian), and the navigation of the channel that lay between shore and island was begun in earnest.

I say begun in earnest, and so it truly was; but so slow was the progress of the boat, and so tortuous the course it made across that watery divide, that a spectator might have been pardoned for wondering in just what fashion the craft had been "Jonahed" before setting out. Not that the efforts of the oarsmen lacked conscientiousness or force. By no means. Both tugged away with all the might at their command, the strokes of each being punctuated with a succession of deep, sobbing gasps that told with perfect plainness their dual sincerity of endeavor. It must have been that the Captain's strokes were a little more powerful than the Commodore's, else they would have made no progress at all; for the former had the bow oars, and when half way across, the two athletes made the simultaneous and heart-breaking discovery that they had been sitting facing each other and manfully pulling in opposite directions.

Deeply shocked and grieved, the Captain let fall his blades and began to weep gently. The Commodore, bestowing a look of utter contempt upon his companion, rose to his feet, stepped solemnly over the side of the boat into twelve feet of water, and proceeded to swim laboriously toward shore. Left to himself, the Captain lay down calmly in the bottom of the craft, without troubling himself concerning the Commodore's fate, and fell asleep.

Every living thing on the Island appeared to leap from its afternoon somnolence into keenest activity at the sound of the Commodore's splash. Every dog gave tongue and rushed for the dock; the hens and ducks and pigs added to the chorus and even a calf on a neighboring island bleated. The whist-party on the veranda broke up suddenly, to the infinite relief of at least one of the participants, and the Major came galloping down the path like a two-year-old. He was preceded by his great "tyke" (as Lighthouse had

termed him) Towser, which, being an animal courageous enough in an emergency, promptly plunged in to the rescue.

Major Plum, seeing his friend apparently *in extremis*, was at once in a paroxysm. "After him, Towser, after him!" he roared; "save him! good dog! save him!"

Now the Commodore, though but an indifferent swimmer, was reaching the dock in very creditable shape without assistance, and seemed to view these preparations for his salvation with anything but gratitude. "Major!" he sputtered, as he saw the great black beast swimming toward him with his honest eyes blazing and his red jaws agape, "I wish to Jehoshophat you'd call off your dog." The Major's concern changed to indignation. "Waugh!" said he. "Wow, you brute!" added the Commodore, lashing out with fists and feet as the Newfoundland grabbed for his coat-collar. A stiff left-hander landed in the devoted animal's jowl and so cooled his ardor that he turned with a yelp of anguish and made for land, leaving his quarry to continue his swimming in peace. At about the moment that the Commodore was dragging his outwardly soaked and inwardly sobered personality upon the dock, the head of the Captain rose above the gunwale of his drifting boat like an overgrown billiard-ball, and his voice, issuing blandly from the yawning cavity of his mouth, came ricocheting over the space: "Ai say, old chap, you might have known you couldn't walk on the wawtah."

The Commodore, with one glance of speechless wrath, abandoned the partner of his afternoon ramble, and, pausing only to thank Major Plum for his solicitude, ascended the path with fairly regular steps, but with his eyes blinking rather more rapidly than usual.

The Major, with the assistance of Jerry (who had not been discharged once during the entire afternoon and was quite civil in consequence), went to the errant Captain's rescue and towed his vagrant craft ashore. Between them they managed to spill the passenger into the lake when within three feet of the dock. The Commodore, meanwhile,

reached his tent without further mischance, and without being perceived by the remaining whist-players on the veranda.

All of the latter had managed to preserve their composure during the uproar, being too closely accustomed to that sort of thing to imagine that it portended serious calamity. Still, they were beset by a mild curiosity, to which Miss Pallon was the first to give voice. She was a young woman who said little and thought much. "I wonder," she said calmly, "if Captain Clapham has succeeded in getting himself into any pickle."

Before the words were fairly out of her mouth, the Captain had answered the hazard for himself. His appearance was preceded by a prodigious "waugh-waughing" and guffawing from the Major, who followed in his tracks, and it was an appearance at once spectacular and dramatic. For the gallant ex-officer of the Queen's navee, like his absent friend, was now soaked from head to heel. Being a stout man, the effect in his case was striking. Water poured from his clothes, and his steps were marked by that sloshing sound, so indescribably doleful, that is the accompaniment of water-logged boots. Water likewise dripped from the hat that he carried in his hand and trickled over his bald pate into his eyes and ears.

Miss Plum abandoned the card-table and started forward. "Captain!" she exclaimed, with concern, "what has happened?"

With a jerk the Captain pulled himself to a standstill and faced his hostess. He made no effort to answer her question, but stood swaying gently from side to side, smiling the bland smile of a person who is confident that the situation will explain itself, or that somebody will explain it for him. Just then the Major gave him a hearty punch between the shoulder-blades that perilously accentuated the swaying, and roared out lustily, "Just think of it! Fell in the lake at his time of life! An old Jack Tar who don't know any

way to get out of a boat but head first! Ho! Ho! Ho! Waugh!"

"How unkind of you to laugh, Papa," expostulated Miss Plum, "are you hurt, Captain?"

"N'yow," replied the drenched sailor, shivering a little, "but I swallowed an awful lot of wawtah."

The Commodore, who had emerged from the tent at the sound of the commotion, and now stood leaning, contemplatively if uncertainly, against a tree, overheard the last remark. "My faith!" he ejaculated, as if to himself, "get him an antidote. Or send for a stomach-pump, somebody."

The ladies giggled. The Captain looked embarrassed. "Ow, there you are, are you?" he called to his comrade, "how d'you feel after your bawth?"

"Bath?" repeated Miss Pallon, in accents of utter incredulity, as she turned to look at the Commodore, "is it possible you have been in the lake, too, Mr. Ellis?"

"Yes," answered that gentleman defiantly.

"Extraordinary!" ejaculated Miss Plum and Gaunt in the same breath.

Miss Plum, ever solicitous for her guests, flew to the house for the Island panacea for all ills. The Commodore, rightfully diagnosing the nature of her mission of mercy, advanced from his tree. The clouds left the Captain's face and he began to beam again. When the bottle and glasses appeared, the Major and his employe joined in the ceremony and the reconciliation of the two old college chums was complete.

But just then the canine chorus broke forth again. (The Major's dogs never lost an opportunity to bay something.) The launch-party was landing at the dock, and the Major, active as a schoolboy, rushed away to assist. Gaunt, with a jolly tar on either side of him, wandered away in the direction of his tent, and assisted in the process of getting the navy into dry clothes.

And then the dinner—Lord, dear Lord, the dinner! Is it permissible to introduce the reader, for the third time on

the same day, to the delights of that bounteous board? N
no, indeed, it is not, and yet the great and absorbing qu
tion of dinner so vastly overshadowed every other ev
of a day's existence on the Island that no guest of Ma
Plum ever discussed it with him unmoved. The provenc
was so substantial and there was so much of it. The atta
upon it was so earnest in purpose, so decisive in its resu
There had been conversation at the preceding meals—
suspicion of frivolity, even. At this one nobody spoke
well toward its close. The Major—ah, right nobly did t
soldier bold that noble onslaught lead! Soup and fish
a wink; a mountain of beef in a bolt—with a forest of ve
tables for wadding and unlimited claret for lubricant—a
the rest of the cargo in easy gradations to the cognac a
cheese—'twas a princely sight indeed! Not that these t
other titled thoroughbreds did not hold the King of
Feast to his pace—ah me, no, no! The Commodore p
ished his platter like a hero, and the Captain, alternately b
or blithe as he wooed the bottle or the dish, weake
not a whit. He did his duty as nobly as did his count
men theirs at Trafalgar. Even the array of fluttering g
hood was more or less infected with the fever of g
tronomical ardor, and, even as it eyed the Major in rever
admiration, entered with enthusiasm into the tournam
of consumption.

Upon persons in good health, the science of overeati
deliberately practiced, has a wonderfully cheering eff
You may go to a table firmly convinced of your indifl
ence to the charm of anything that may be placed upon
and, always provided your digestion be in good order,
temptation will lead to another with charming irresistibil
To Gaunt, whose real education in gastronomy had o
commenced with his residence in New York, the Maj
dinners, to which he had been perpetually invited, had
first seemed nightmares. Nowadays they gave him pleas
in two ways—by pampering his appetite and exciting
risibilities. It was impossible to watch the Major throu

a dinner and not want to laugh every minute. The newcomer from the West had discovered, in the ceremony of dinner at the Island, the one thing that temporarily stifled the desire to get away from it. He found that by devouring lavish quantities of food, with the voracity that appeared to be in vogue, he could forget the ennui of these visits and the peril in which his editorial position on *The Fang* would stand if he were to refuse to make them. Thus, while at the outset of dinner, the Major might have seemed an ogre, the Commodore a bore, the Captain a fossil and the array of fluttering girlhood a parcel of freaks, the simple process of absorbing certain quantities of solid food and a couple of bottles of claret exercised a transformation as complete as it was remarkable. The Major became a comedian, the Commodore a raconteur, the Captain a hero and the array of fluttering girlhood a burden less grievous to be borne That sort of thing is one of the numerous effects that the stomach may be led to exercise upon the brain. There are others that are scarcely as pleasant, but they come later in life.

And so the long day came to an end; for after the solemn and tremendous event of dinner there was little more to be said or done, on the Island. The last dog-fight took place just in time to wake the Major out of his customary post-prandial nap, but it was not a serious conflict, and when Jerry had settled it by gently fanning Towser over the head with a barrel-stave, the host and the array of fluttering girlhood and one or two others organized a game of ten-cent-limit poker, which supplied all necessary facilities for transferring the warfare from the kennel to the house. Delicious contrasts! Divine, soft, beautiful summer night—laden with zephyrs light as gossamer and fragrant with the breath of mountain pine! And the Captain and the Commodore—brave fellows!—sat to it manfully, the bottle betwixt 'em, and each cherishing in his heart the futile resolve to out-lie and out-bluster the other if it took till morning to do it. But even they grew weary of the night air, and of the good things,

and went to bed, as became stout men and true, with pi in their hearts and their boots on their feet, and with e a snore in his respective snout loud enough to awaken se regiments of dead. And the night wind sighed on, pl and uninsulted. And by and bye, when the poker game terminated in the usual row, the array of fluttering girlh floated forth upon the veranda, timidly and sweetly, as came it, and captured that gallant Major, God wot, heigho! stand and deliver it was, with never a sig flinching on the sturdy old warrior's part and never a w ness or tremor of the assaulting party till all the fair j was o'er. For McLaren, who sat on a rock by the edg the water with Gaunt, counted the smacks and breathed through his nose, exclaiming for the hundredth time day, "ye gods, is he not a wonder?" And then the a of fluttering girlhood rippled away in search of its lin virgin couches; the Major, sleepy at last, kicked a do two, and sought his own den, murmuring a final disch of Jerry, his man; McLaren, punctuating his laug with a yawn, uttered a cheery good-night and slunk a to roost—and the Dreamer was left alone.

For him, this was one hour on the Island that could be improved upon. He reveled in it with deliberate utter selfishness. The expanse of tranquil water, lit by chaste white beauty of the moon, made a picture as nea heaven as ever comes to earth. And oh, the silence— grave, appealing, wondrous charm of it! When one is sessed by certain moods, are there any two earthly luxu half so splendid as those twin ones of solitude and siler I doubt it.

CHAPTER XIX

THE MAJOR EN ROUTE

When the friends of Major John Plum declared that he was a remarkable man, they were not far out of their reckoning. It was, perhaps, his limitless store of energy, added to his perpetually youthful buoyancy of spirit, that most frequently excited the wonder of those who knew him best. A man of vast physical strength, always, or nearly always, in robust health, and possessed of an inexhaustible store of good nature, and of effervescence—it was no wonder that his personality excited pleasure and mystification wherever it went. The Major could dispense with sleep for forty-eight hours without losing weight, and the hottest day of summer, while it might induce perspiration, failed to give him fatigue. His "waugh-waugh" was as resonant and his vocabulary as vigorous after climbing to the top of a mountain in August as it was at the close of a nocturnal supper at the Metropole in midwinter. A rousing, bouncing, noisy, vigorous, open-hearted, choleric old man — what wonder that everybody loved him?

The Major's abundance of energy was never more convincingly demonstrated than by the frequency of his flying trips between his Island in the lake and his office in New York. It was a sixteen-hour journey by rail and steamboat (and sliced up by exasperating waits and transfers, at that), but the Monarch of the Island made it regularly twice a week, and the train of exuberantly happy porters and waiters that he left in his wake proved at once the stability of his appetite and the munificence of his tips.

The departure from the Island usually took place on Sunday afternoon, after a dinner that broke all records for the week. Those left behind bore the ordeal with resignation,

the dogs being quieted with Jerry's barrel-stave, and the lamentations of the array of fluttering girlhood being bottled up for release at the moment of supreme agony caused by the starting of the steamer from her dock. To this dock the Major was conveyed in state in his naphtha launch, together with such of his guests as were to accompany him on the journey to New York; and as a general thing his leave-taking was witnessed by fully half the population of the village. Breathlessly, and in awe, the sunburned guides and their families, together with the village idiot, the barber, the blacksmith and a sprinkling of hotel-keepers, gathered to watch the exit of the great man. The dock itself was a small one, and the Major, as he stood upon it, waiting for the steamer, dwarfed the dimensions of the piles of trunks and freight that usually lay upon it. When the final farewells had been said and the jolly fat figure of the Major could be seen at the stern of the vessel gallantly waving his hat, the native population sighed deeply and went home. It loved the Major; but it was too indolent to weep, too phlegmatic to cheer. Besides, it knew that the Good Thing of the neighborhood was going away for five days and that the industries of pursuing carefully hidden game and fish, at exorbitant rates of compensation, would languish for a season in consequence.

The male guests left behind on the Island on such occasions missed the Major sadly, but the situation had its compensating advantages in the hospitality of Miss Plum, which was always dispensed with a lavishness and grace that left nothing to be desired. To be sure, the array of fluttering girlhood was never seen at its best in the absence of the lord and master, but by skillful engineering it could be avoided when desirable, and its internecine embroilments, which were as inevitable as dawn and sunset, dodged by the tactful and discreet. Still, the void created by the departure of that ruthless steamer was one quite impossible to fill.

So, to-day, having torn about the Island in a broiling sun all the morning; having disciplined the dogs, dis-

charged Jerry and inspected that portion of the live stock not eaten for his dinner, the Major was in a mood to take life more easily. His telegraphic farewells to his dear ones completed, he found himself in an arm-chair on the upper deck, in the full glare of the sun, where he became immersed, after his habit, in a cigar and the Sunday newspapers.

McLaren and Gaunt, whose presence in town was imperative, in view of the work of putting the paper to press, found a cool corner abaft the paddle-wheel, where they could chat comfortably. "This is the sort of country I should wish to live in if I were a poet," declared the former, making a sort of obeisance, with head and hand, to the superb line of mountains they were passing, "I know of no lake scenery more beautiful—not even in Switzerland."

"It is absolute perfection," admitted the other, "such color-combinations in hill and sky and water are hard to find. I don't wonder the Major raves over them."

"The Major," smiled McLaren, with an eloquent uplifting of the brows, "is an enthusiast on everything—from the mere fact of living, to the delicate problem of making one. He thinks this lake is wonderful just because he happens to have built a house on it. As a matter of fact it is wonderful, but if it were a mud-puddle in an alley, he'd rave over it if he himself happened to admire it; and he'd expect you to do so, too."

His companion laughed. "But he's not a bad sort—the Major," ventured he.

"Bad sort!" ejaculated the editor, in horror, "why, man, he's the best ever. The Major is one of the most wonderful characters in fiction or out of it. A better-tempered enthusiast doesn't breathe. As you've probably discovered, his fits of rage are wholly counterfeit. His hospitality is most amazing; though to be sure"—this with a slight drooping of the eyelid—"we manage to even scores for that in some way. For his age, he is the hardest-working man I know. And he is never still—on the go all the time. He's like a runaway locomotive—all headway and escaping steam.

How can anyone help admiring a twentieth century marvel like that?"

"How did he happen to pitch his tent up here?" inquired his listener.

"Mere whim," was the prompt reply; "the paper happened to be making a little money, two years ago, and the Major never so miserable, you know, as when he's got a few thousands that he sees no immediate way of scattering. He was passing through here after a deer-hunting trip and liked the location. So he built his castle on the Island you've just left. I think it's the wisest thing he ever did. The fresh air he gets up here gives him backbone for his energetic life in town."

"I envy him his vitality," asserted Gaunt.

"Vitality's no name for it," insisted the editor, elevating his feet upon the railing and leaning back comfortably in his chair; "I tell you the Major's a perambulating electric battery. Just look at him now! Only half an hour out of the spot in which he chucks all his business cares to the winds. He's been 'loafing,' as he calls it, since Thursday, although, as you've seen, he's been active enough in more ways than one. And never for an instant is that seething brain idle. He leaps out of his rest into the business maelstrom like a fish. Did you see the way he dived into those papers? Do you see the way he's devouring them now? He sees nothing of these matchless mountains—of this charming lake. His intellect is grasping every detail and item of those printed pages, investigating the journalistic and business possibilities of each. Do you notice how every few minutes he will cast his eyes to the blue heavens and mutter? When he does that, he is absorbing some valuable fact—planning, possibly, some brilliant coup. Before the night falls sweetly over this dreamful mere, the Major will know the Sunday papers by heart. He will be able, if he chooses, to recite the society columns in his sleep. And if anyone in society has been misbehaving, then woe to that person!"

"I've been studying the old chap pretty closely in the past

ear," confessed Gaunt, "and I find him interesting. In act, I have always done so."

"Interesting is not the word," insisted McLaren, "I tell you he's simply a phenomenon. The more I see of him the more firmly I'm convinced of it. His mental absorption of the Sunday newspapers is a necessary preliminary to his dive into the vortex of complications that he usually finds ready to greet him at the office on Monday mornings. You've seen a great deal of that sort of thing and know what it means. The trait that I most admire in the Major is his absolute imperviousness to worry. He can plunge straight from his lovely summer home into a sea of possible libel suits and doubtful checks. And he never turns a hair. If he isn't a miracle, I never saw one."

The little steamer was now passing through a narrow channel, 'twixt a low, flat island and the towering mainland hills. The scenery for every mile of the journey was superb. An endless panorama of green hills and checkered fields; overhead a blue sky dotted with fleecy clouds and here, on the deck, a breeze as gentle as an infant's breath. The boat, emerging from the channel, wound its tortuous course past isles and rocks and pine-crowned promontories, stopping at frequent intervals, at odd little landing-stages, to receive additions to its passenger-list. Mountain boarding-houses, in which young men of fashion secured shelter and recreation at six dollars per week up, discharged their little contributions to the Sunday night exodus; the departure of the masculine element being bewailed, as a rule, by a bevy of wholesome-looking girls on the dock. The few young men in white flannels, and shirts of wondrous hues, who remained behind, exhibited elation in a degree corresponding to the depression of those departing; and the young ladies, as the boat moved off, waved adieux with handkerchiefs held in taper fingers stained by contact with blackberries, or the typewriter.

Major Plum presently abandoned his newspapers and began striding slowly down the deck. As he did so he pre-

sented a fine example of aggressive masculinity, and at least one of the men who watched him marveled at the change that had come over him with his reading and his meditations.

There was an absolute metamorphosis in the old fellow's manner and aspect. The boyishness, the flippancy, the inability to take life seriously, that had marked his deportment at the Island, had vanished utterly. He walked slowly along, with his hands clasped behind him and his head lowered in an attitude of profound thought. The expression of his face was that of a man battling with the gravest possible problems, and it lent to his fine eyes and forehead a dignity they never wore in his lighter moods. In such a moment it was impossible to look at his face and fail to recognize the might and weight of the intellect hidden beneath that crown of silver hair. In fact the Major might have been mistaken, at such times, for any one of three types of personage all equi-distant from affinity with himself—a mighty statesman, considering affairs of the commonwealth; a Bishop mentally conning an address to his prelates; a philanthropist, planning wholesale benefactions to his race. A mere glance at him when in this mood was sufficient to prove how serious the playful old soldier could be when he chose. He was undoubtedly thinking of his newspaper. And his present seriousness made his past riant juvenility seem all the more amazing by comparison.

The Major's reverie was unnoticed by McLaren, who had grown sleepy after his disquisition on his chief's nervous stamina, and was now leaning back in his chair with his hat over his eyes, nodding. For an hour or more the venerable proprietor of *The Fang* continued his meditations and his pacing of the deck, his appearance, while so engaged, evidently impressing his fellow passengers most vastly. Men and women regarded him with interest, and in most cases their admiration was but poorly concealed. Then, as the sun sank, in a sea of gold and crimson, behind the western line of mountains and the dusk stole down over the ripple-

less lake, the passengers began gathering up their traps, preparatory to landing. The little craft was by this time ploughing her way bravely across a wide, smooth bay, at the upper end of which the two lines of mountains met—the end of the great lake, where the wayfarer connected with the night train for New York.

There was, however, a wait of some three hours and a half between the hour that the steamer reached her dock and that of the departure of the train; and this time Major Plum was in the habit of spending, with great pleasure to himself and his friends, in the task of heightening, among the residents, the sense of his individuality. There was a sweet little village here, nestling at the foot of the historic hills upon which French and English battled years ago, and at the very edge of the sleepy water, in the shade of towering trees, loomed two large hotels. The Major, who had thrown off his abstracted manner the instant that he stepped upon the wharf, resuming his boyhood at one beautiful bound, began operations with a headlong rush upon the ticket office. He was the fortunate possessor of a sleeping-car pass, the privileges of which he extended very generously to his friends, and it was his habit to reserve for himself each Sunday night, by telegraph, the greater part of a car. He now pushed his head through a window and inquired in a mighty roar whether his sections had been reserved. The clerk, familiar with his patron's ways, informed him amiably that everything was correct; upon which the Major, beckoning to his two editors and scattering a handful of largesse to the horde of grinning village urchins at his heels, ejaculated, "Wow, boys! I'm as thirsty as a goat!" and was off for his favorite hotel like a shot. This distribution of largesse, by the way, was one of the old warrior's most admirable habits. Never guilty of paying money recklessly, he rarely let slip an opportunity of giving it away.

The hotel to which the three travelers repaired was one of the quality known as "fashionable," and brought to that quiet mountain-side a few of the more or less accursed fea-

tures from which it is impossible to separate such insti tions in summer. Spindle-legged children with strid voices and precocious manners strutted the piazzas, and dining-room was full of distressing young men who wor woe to people of delicate sensibilities by wearing knicl bockers in gaslight. But it was not all woe, either; for a the inevitable beefsteak and ale with the Major in the g room, there came an hour of most exquisite rest and qu The indefatigable warrior captured the landlord of the h and, pinning him ruthlessly in a corner of the pia preached him a sermon on the idiocy of attempting to tinue in business without advertising in *The Fang*. Laren and Gaunt were, therefore, left to the agreeable time of loafing in two rustic chairs on the velvety lawn sloped gently to the water's edge, smoking their cigar and listening to the strains of a very passable string b that floated from the windows. There was scarcely a br of air stirring, and the scent of the fresh grass and of a of mignonette near by was delicious. Over the water lights of fairy-like craft danced and glittered, and beyon like sentinels, the great blue hills kept watch. A pe picture of peace for a summer Sunday night; and it presently made more perfect, for some mountain idler a ringing tenor, amateurish in quality, but very convin and clear, sang Faure's "Les Rameaux" to the little orc tra's accompaniment, and under the spell of that nobl it was possible to forget even the spindle-shanked chil and the young men in bicycle clothes. In such mom —amid such appealing combinations of agreeable na conditions, of mental peace, and of music—the Drean memory, even at this late day, kept him busy. By m shutting his eyes, he could escape the vision of the sil bay, the twinkling lights and the watchful hills, and another:—one of a mystical, far-away world of white pa and of gardens of insolent red flowers, amidst which sta the ghost of a golden Youth and a little yellow-haired frisked and played. And he was awakened from his d

with an abruptness that was humorous. "*Beni celui qui vient sauver le monde*," chanted the tenor, and amid the pattering of applause from the lawns and piazzas, the voice of McLaren broke in upon the dream, lazily, but with startling directness: "I say, old man," he drawled, "I've told you a good deal about what I think of the Major. What do you think of his daughter?"

Gaunt took a long breath. His thoughts ran a steeple-chase before he answered, slowly: "She is a very dutiful girl." And McLaren laughed.

"Waugh!"

It came like a cannon-shot from the piazza up above, and the spell of the air, the lights and the quiet water was broken beyond mending. Somebody had told the Major it lacked but fifteen minutes to train time, and his surprise was explosive. "Here, you chaps," he bawled, blithely, "come on, or we're all going to get left." And pushing his cigar into his mouth with one hand and a satisfactory advertising contract into his hip-pocket with the other, he flew down the path like a race-horse, with his two employes dutifully following behind.

At the train an interesting scene took place. It was enacted regularly, every Sunday night, and would have been side-splitting in a farce-comedy. As the imposing figure of the Major loomed into view across the tracks, a small army of negro porters, keenly on the lookout for precisely that event, formed a sort of flying wedge, football fashion, and fell on him like a coal-black avalanche. Several were overturned in the rush and others mourned the loss of teeth and wool in the fury of the stampede. Some grabbed the Major by the coat-tails; others swarmed in front of him, grinning with delight and kow-towing like mandarins. At all this attention the old man pretended to be greatly annoyed, but it was easy to see, by the jovial twinkle n his eye, how vastly he enjoyed it. "Here! here! you black rascals!" he exclaimed impetuously, as a section of the dusky army phalanxed themselves in his rear and, with a combined

heave, shouldered him up the steps of the sleeping-car, "let go, there! Let go, I say!" (If they had obeyed, then Heaven help the Major). "You're all too fresh, cuss you! You think you'll bleed me, cuss you! But you won't. No, there isn't one of you'll get a darned cent. I never give niggers anything." And the ecstatic guffaws of the ebony horde proved how implicitly they disbelieved the declaration. Some half dozen disappeared with the Major into the car, to assist in the preparation of his sleeping toilet, the others being only deterred from pursuit by a hasty promise of a division of the spoils. And presently the long train went lumbering away up the mountains and the subdued diapason of three or four grunts and "waughs" from the dear old hustler's berth indicated that he was about to enjoy a well-earned rest at last.

The thought of the labors and cares and tribulations of the morrow? The Major's system was proof against such trifles. They never vexed him.

CHAPTER XX

A JOURNAL OF MODERN SOCIETY

The journal known as *The Fang* was a power in the social world of New York. The influence that it wielded in some directions was tremendous. It was an influence springing almost wholly from fear. That is to say, people feared the paper not so much for anything it said in any particular issue, but for what it might possibly say in a succeeding one. Its merely satirical comments on social affairs were amusing to everybody; it was when it descended into the arena of scandal and flourished, so to speak, all its weapons at once, that it became terrific. There were writers on the staff who were past masters in the arts of ambiguous attack and cunningly woven innuendo, and it was probably true that there

were more sinners in society who trembled at the thought of what it might say than there were of innocent persons who had actually suffered from its attacks. It was the proud boast of the publisher that his paper was a distinct public benefactor; inasmuch as it exercised a wholesome deterrent influence upon those who, in the absence of dread of its chastening hand, would habitually misbehave. This, to be sure, was one way of looking at it, though up to the time of the events here recorded, the publisher of *The Fang* had been presented with neither a medal nor a formal vote of thanks by the Society for the Prevention of Vice.

The prestige of the paper, as a power in social matters, was due to the fact that it rarely made a mistake in recording a piece of news or predicting an event. Its never-failing accuracy had secured it an enormous circulation. People in the smart world recognized its news as authoritative, and those outside that world knew that in reading its pages they were absorbing the very gospel of the great. In its ability to do this—to supply its readers with the very latest morsel of scandal, the hour-old hearsay of the boudoirs—*The Fang* was exceptionally fortunate, for in the absence of such ability it would never have achieved its success. It was indebted, moreover, for its social news of the metropolis, to one person—a gentleman of good standing in the world of fashion and the clubs—who wrote for a consideration, and with the understanding that his incognito was to be rigidly preserved. This invaluable personage was naturally made a good deal of by Major Plum—in the office, for the contributor never by any chance recognized the publisher outside of it—and he was regarded with a good deal of interest by the other members of the staff. He was a man of perhaps forty years, who, having but scant fortune and mediocre blood connections of his own, had established his position in society by marrying into one of the old families. The alliance, however, while it had brought him position, had not blessed him with wealth, and without the liberal sum that he received each week from *The Fang*, as his reward for exposing

the foibles of the Society that he worshiped, the gentl "Jimmy," as he was known to his intimates, would have been in sore straits for the payment of his club dues and the pacification of his florist.

This "Jimmy," like the Major, was a gentleman of strong contrasts. His joviality of manner, when in immediate professional contact with his associates on the paper, was pronounced and infectious. He had a jolly round face, which long seasons of good living had seamed with streaks of indigo and vermilion, and with a group of his fellow-writers about him, he would chat and tell stories by the hour. On the contrary, the rigid conscientiousness with which he cut the acquaintance of the entire staff, from Major to cashier, outside the editorial domain, was one of the most beautiful sights of the age. This habit of his impressed itself very strongly upon Gaunt when lunching one day with Major Plum in Delmonico's. The famous café was crowded, of course, with professional and social celebrities, and the presence of "Jimmy" was only made known to the young man, who knew him but slightly at the time, by seeing the Major bowing to him, with great affability and good humor To his astonishment, "Jimmy's" response to this cordial sal utation was to turn in his seat, a few tables away, carefully adjust his monocle and bestow upon his employer a stare eloquent with disdain and yet devoid of any sign of recog nition. It was a most artistic performance, and the recrui from Chicago, albeit full of wonder, could not help admiring its exquisite insolence. Its effect, too, upon the Major, wa interesting. It caused that gentleman to softly ejaculate "Waugh!" and sputter gravy into his beard. While his in come from *The Fang*, therefore, was most useful, this jolly "Jimmy" knew his own value too well to permit any libertie from the Major; and he never evinced the slightest inten tion of jeopardizing his own position in society by per mitting the people of whose doings he wrote to witness hi recognition, in public, of any member of the paper's staff So, however guilty he might feel with regard to the toastin

and rapping of his own friends, he could never be accused of any concealment of his feelings with regard to the publisher of the paper. In appearance, "Jimmy" was the typical beau of story and romance—sleek, well-groomed, with a suave manner and an inexhaustible fund of small-talk on the tip of his tongue. The sort of a man, you know, who can bend over a table at five o'clock in the afternoon with a tea-cup and saucer in one hand and his gloves and a platterful of abominable sweet stuff in the other; and who, by reason of his ability to swallow the tea and the sweets without spilling the one or choking over the other, and at the same time to keep an army of women in animated conversation, is voted "a charming fellow." Of such type, then, was "Jimmy"—a gentleman who loved and reverenced Society and all its sacred traditions; who lived in it and for it; who shed his cares when entering his club as readily as his hat when entering church; a man who idolized Fortune and forgave any vice save Obscurity—and who wrote of Society's frailties for pay. A strange combination, surely, and one perhaps only possible in a community that devotes nine-tenths of its energies to the worship of mammon.

Without the "inside news" furnished by "Jimmy" *The Fang* could not have flourished. Without Major Plum's weekly checks, "Jimmy" would have been posted at his clubs. That was the exact nature of the interchange of benefits. In one sense, therefore, "Jimmy" might have been held accountable for all the wrath awakened from time to time by this widely hated journal; though, to be sure, no one but a brute would have thought of shouldering such a load upon the conscience of so even and sunny-tempered a man. "Jimmy's" paragraphs, then, forming, as they did, the backbone or mainspring of *The Fang*, were devoured with a great thirst, each week, by languid-eyed young gentlemen of fashion who awaited the appearance of the paper with impatience. In a corner of the club, or at the window-tables in "Del's"; one could always see one or more of these rare exotics with nose buried in these paragraphs, which

usually began with "I learn with regret" when introducing a scandal, or "I am informed upon unimpeachable authority," when guessing at a possible engagement. The deadly accuracy of the news in the paragraphs exasperated the persons it concerned almost as deeply as it mystified them as to its source. The dapper and unblushing "Jimmy" usually wandered into the office in good season of a Monday morning, bringing his "copy" with him, and when it was of lively quality, Editor McLaren's good temper increased. "Jimmy's" paragraphs disposed of, together with those from outside contributors, the members of the staff were at liberty to spend their Monday and Tuesday in the production of more or less brilliant skits of their own. The paper was sent to press late Tuesday night, or rather, early Wednesday morning, and for the rest of the week the editors, when not engaged in holiday-making, employed themselves at their leisure in selecting manuscripts available for subsequent issues.

This process of "going to press," as it is called, on Tuesday night, was one fraught sometimes with solemnity, sometimes with merriment. The Major, who never ventured to interfere with McLaren's plans for the make-up of the paper, made a habit of arriving on the scene early in the evening for the purpose of reading his proofs; and his mood was of course dependent upon the degree in which he had enjoyed his dinner. When in good fettle, his cheery jokes and great laugh echoed through the building—deserted by all save the busy staff of *The Fang*—like the skirling of a nor'wester. When for any reason nettled or depressed, he hurled "Waugh-Waughs" at the typographical errors and grunted until his swivel-chair shook with the concussion. Separated only by a thin partition and an open door from McLaren and the latter's subordinates, the nature of his mood was easily communicated, and the members of the staff telegraphed their approval or disapproval of it to one another by signs less dignified than expressive. The musical critic, a most learned and amiable gentleman

ho had a way of resigning every Tuesday morning if his ıeck for his week's labor was not sent to him on Monday ight, was in the habit of dropping leaden paper-weights n the floor whenever the Chief, from his desk in the next ɔom, unburdened himself of a remark charged with edi-ɔrial wisdom; and Gaunt and McLaren, who had by long ractice acquired the art of laughing noiselessly behind ıeir clenched fists, were never caught in any overt act of ilarity. The comedy resultant upon the Major's efforts to e wise ended with his departure from the scene, at mid-ight or thereabouts—an event which he signalized with series of "waugh-waughs" and trumpetings that convinced veryone present of its importance and desirability. His ɜaving was followed by two or three hours of hard and erious work by the staff; after which the birth of another ɜsue of this most widely read journal of modern American ɔciety was an accomplished fact.

It was an odd little party that moved out into the deserted treet an hour or so before dawn:—three or four sleepy-ɔoking men, whose intellectual brilliancy, if they possessed ny, would never have been guessed on the strength of their ɔorn-out appearance. And yet the peace or misery of many ıdividuals occupying lofty places in society was directly ependent upon what these sleepy-eyed men had been oing. The sting of the paper just "put to press" would ɔring acute dismay to many. It seemed odd to think of all ɔociety waiting, a-tremble, for the literary mess put forth ɔy a quartette of sleepy men, of most ordinary appearance, ɜsuing from a gloomy office building, at three o'clock in the ıorning.

CHAPTER XXI

THE DEVOIRS OF A DREAMER

"* * * * * and yet there is a certain satisfaction in the perpetual proof of my inability to forget you. My own discontent gratifies me at times, because it affords, in a way, evidence of my fidelity to memories as dear as were ever given to man. If it had been in my power to rid myself of all thought of you, I might have been happier, but I should have felt more guilty; to find that I still regret, after all this time, almost flatters me into the belief that I have a conscience.

"It is deplorably bad form, I know, to be writing to you in this strain, but I am not guilty of it often, and I do not believe you mind. Even now there are times when I fail to realize the deadly import of the events that have come to pass. The ending of our life together was so startling, and the method of that ending so brutal, that it seems, sometimes as if one would wake up and find it a nightmare. Yet it is deadly earnest, is it not, my dear? and your firm refusal to make it up and begin all over again convinces me of the idleness of dreaming over the impossible. Perhaps, after all, you are right. The shadow of this trouble would always be between us. And it is quite impossible to help respecting you for your inflexibility of will. You are a determined little hater, are you not? You first convince yourself that you are right and then live up to your theory like a heroine. Only you must let me beg of you this one thing: That whatever the future may bring, whatever of sorrow or joy, you will try to remember how earnestly I tried to repair the wrong while there was time. That is the thought that troubles me most—that I should be held guilty of causing pain when I would give a whole lifetime of sacrifice in order

to remove it. You, however, will not accept the atonement, and—you know best.

"Desperately foolish in me, and perhaps vain, also, is it to assume that you, too, have regrets, and yet my excuse is a good one. Little wife-that-was, I know your character so well. I know that a girl of your kind loves but once, and that while your conscience may applaud, your heart will be playing you tricks. It seems unfair that the burdens of this life should be so unevenly divided. I have many interests to divert me, and can worry along somehow. With you, life must be more difficult. You have so much more time to reflect.

"Stupid as it may be, I find it difficult to realize that you and I are upon two paths that diverge more widely with every year that we traverse them. I have an old-fashioned notion, of which I find it next to impossible to rid myself, to the effect that a man's wife is always his wife, no matter what happens, and the idea that we can be separated forever because a mere law-court signs a decree to that effect seems childish and absurd. And yet your attitude is so very convincing that I cannot choose but accept it as definite and final. You leave me no other course. Perhaps I deserve censure for having failed to recognize the hopelessness of the situation long ago. Still, while to have done so would possibly have been more sensible, it would have been less complimentary to you.

"The keenness of the regret that I have endured by reason of my loss of you convinces me that my errors must have been atrocious beyond belief. Heaven would hardly have requited them so bitterly otherwise. And yet I know men that—pooh! what does all that matter? Whatever my errors may have been, I do not purpose adding to them the quite unpardonable one of being envious. On the contrary, I ought to be glad that some of the sinners have escaped. And I can at least offer you assurance now of the sincerity of my declaration that I intend to be wise hereafter—that I am going to grasp the situation at last and school myself

to the odd notion of passing the rest of my life witho you. I regret that I cannot further gratify you by promisi to forget you. The sweetness of my memories must sta responsible for that.

"But you are right. There are consolations. This ea ern country improves on acquaintance. I fancy that I a developing into a fairly loyal type of New Yorker, if only reason of the ardor with which I adore the city in win and fly from it in summer. Quite frequently I spend h of the week at the Major's island castle among the mou tains. The scenery is superb up there and the Major such an inimitable host. But nothing, to my mind, co pares with this glorious Hudson River. It is majest overpowering and restful, all in one, and since making summer abiding-place on its banks I have learned to w ship its beauty as a sort of idol or fetish. In the mornin and afternoons, when the sun is upon it, I loaf under trees and weave the little poems and romances that go market, later, in the form of type-written manuscript; a at night, when the moon has silvered the sweet panora of the ebbing tide and the creeping ships, I stretch my in my hammock, in exquisite indolence, and dream, li absent one, of you. You must not think, from that, tha is all indolence and lotus-eating by this river; for it is There are times when I am overtaken by a desperate despicable desire for work—fierce, physical work, I m that hardens the body and rests the brain. Such an att usually follows the conviction—a conviction that has b growing upon me of late!—that the habit of dreamin an enervating one and verges upon the effeminate. desire for work, then, finds its outlet in a pull with Crew. Our boat-club, you must know, maintains a passable crew, even if a Dreamer is numbered in the ei What an antidote for remorse!—what a kingly cure for blues—that slashing, rhythmical stroke, down, down the tide, in obedience to the shrieks of a merciless little b of a coxswain who will detect the first sign of faltering

to whom it is impossible to 'talk back!' An hour's heart-breaking pull in such company is worth forty sermons. The brawny back and arms of the man in front of you in the shell afford inspiration for your own effort, and the rub-down and the souse in the river after the return to the float are productive of a bliss too deep for words. After such a row, over the very water, maybe, in which I have lolled alone in a skiff dreaming of you the night before, I always experience a sensation of having atoned for something. If the dreaming is a silly habit the athletic one surely is not. Perhaps persistence in one will cure me of indulgence in the other.

"Dear, sublime, old Hudson River—stately as music, tender as a poem! I have sailed over you in the daytime, penned apostrophes to your beauty in the night. I have whispered to you my confidences, my regrets, my hopes; and I have thought how well you typify the remorseless striding of Fate, in your ceaseless sweep of the sea. I have watched the white sails and the scudding gulls skimming your broad breast in the dawn and in the dusk, and have wondered if there were any other stream in all the world so majestic and so restful as you. I have watched you in your seasons, studied you in your moods. Yes, I have even *swam* you—swam you fairly, from shore to shore, at night, on a cheerful inebriate's wager, with skirling clouds overhead and a mountainous ebb-tide running. That, indeed, was a sensation worth the living for. For so much, River, believe me that I am grateful!

"Heigho! A rhapsody in the midst of a letter—a sort of a farewell letter, too. How inexcusable! But that 'inebriate's wager,' dear girl, reminds me that I have scored at least one improvement in behavior for which I ought to claim your applause. In my youth I drank wine—as most witless young men do—out of sheer idleness; drank, as you once hinted to me, rarely to excess, but always with sufficient industry to acquire an artificial elation of spirit wholly unnecessary to one who has everything to live for.

I am happy to say that my present line of conduct is, by com parison, simply unimpeachable. I now drink scientificall and with a purpose. The science lies in knowing when t stop; the purpose is—to forget. By careful study and ex periment I have found that by absorbing a certain amour of stimulant I can round off the sharp corners of remorsef retrospect and lessen the distressing sense of my own lac of importance in the world. I despise, as I have alwa despised, a man who drinks until he is beyond the sphe of coherent speech or thought. It is so asinine in him t rob himself of the delight of witnessing the idiocy of h companions. But the kindly influence, the tender, healin balm of that blessed desideratum—JUST ENOUGH 'Just enough,' you know, to produce a resigned toleratic of commonplace woes and griefs; 'just enough' to crea the dear delusion, for a very little while, that wrong is righ 'just enough,' forsooth, to suggest crazy midnight swi across three-mile rivers and a simultaneous indifference their results; 'just enough,' you dear, flinty-hearted lit Presbyterian tyrant, to inspire the temporary belief that t gray old world is habitable—without *you!*

"That is all sad nonsense, and it shall stop. There nothing more to say, except that my days and nights side this beautiful, restful river, away from the turmoil a glare of the great town that is so enchanting at any ot season—a little soft world of placid water and turquo sky and sweet green trees!—have been my best; beca they have brought me my dreams of you. But perhaps y do not find even that fact interesting! You won't te Even so, then! Good-bye."

"E."

CHAPTER XXII

REMINISCENCES AND A SPECTRE

On the off days of the week—that is to say, on any but the two hard-working days before mentioned—the conviviality in *The Fang* office usually began about eleven o'clock in the morning, shortly after the arrival of Commodore Ellis. The Commodore was not a salaried member of the staff, but he wrote very readable paragraphs on yachting and naval affairs—a practice that afforded him the excuse for making the office his headquarters. He spent possibly four hours each week in actual work, passing the rest of his time in a large easy chair in a corner of the editorial rooms. In this chair (which piece of furniture, by the way, bore the very appropriate name of "Ellis' Rest") the Commodore was accustomed to read, to think, and, occasionally to sleep. From the haven of its comfortable embrace he was wont to blink his eyes critically at all creation and utter learned disquisitions upon every conceivable subject under the sun. From an ignorant person, or a vain one, these sermons would have been an imposition and a bore; but they were delivered by the Commodore in so modest a manner and with such evident mountains of actual knowledge behind the words, that they were received with respect even when their eye-blinking accompaniment was most nerve-wracking. His arrival, then, or rather the delivery of his first sermon, was usually followed by the discovery, by every other man present, of his possession of a thirst, and the adjournment to Delmonico's followed. The Commodore, in this respect, was the most charitable person living. Being fully aware of the average working journalist's hatred of the mournful occupation known as "drinking alone," he never by any chance declined an invitation to

share the burden; and the charming qualities of his companionship repaid many times the cost of the tipple. This eleven-o'clock adjournment, therefore, with its half-hour of stimulation and cheer, heightened by a story or two from the Commodore and a swift view of the lively Broadway panorama from the café windows, never failed to put an agreeable edge on the morning. It also enlivened general interest in the problem, never absent from that office, as to which member of his corps of typewriters the Major would next threaten to discharge.

The afternoon session, or symposium, however, was a more elaborate matter. It usually began about four o'clock and the number of its participants was only limited by the condition of the general exchequer. At the hour mentioned the company was tolerably certain to receive an addition in the person of Captain Clapham, who had considered himself a regular attaché of the paper ever since he had painted a most stunning portrait (in oils) of the Major some two years before. The Captain's mode of notifying the occupants of the editorial rooms of his presence was most delicate and winsome. It never varied. It began by his pushing open the outer door just far enough to admit his head, shoulders and arms. Having removed his hat, he would sigh deeply, once or twice, and give with his silk handkerchief a few swift polishes to his bald pate that made it shine like a mackerel. This done, he would sigh again and murmur, gently, and with great amiability, the kindly greeting, "Hello, chaps." If this performance failed to awaken a response from the editors, who might very possibly be writing during its progress, the Captain had recourse to other measures. He would wait until he caught the eye of Gaunt, McLaren, or anyone else who happened to be by, and then, in silence, but with a leer of indescribable cunning, would open his mouth, point to it with the index finger of his right hand, wink solemnly three times, and wrinkle his brows into the necessary interrogation point. This system of wig-wagging, while it never failed to pro-

voke an invitation to enter, was viewed with cold disapproval by the Captain's friend, the Commodore. The latter, from his easy chair, would give the newcomer the curtest of nods, which, to tell the truth, appeared to distress him not at all. In fact, there appeared to exist between these two estimable old gentlemen at all times a sort of mutual disapproval of each other's habits. Each being firmly convinced that the other was going headlong to ruin through drink, was determined to save him from himself if possible. The Captain, though verging on sixty, was a trifle the more skittish of the two, and the Commodore, mindful of the effects of the evil example on buoyant and irresponsible youth, considered it his duty to tighten the check-rein on his friend whenever possible. It was only after the second bottle or so, taken in companionship, that the mutual vigilance of the pair over each other's moral rectitude was in any way relaxed. After that the Captain usually decided that nothing could hurt the Commodore, and the Commodore, as he viewed the Captain, held that youth must have its fling. So all was harmony until the gallant Captain's next entrance to the editorial rooms, with his "Hello, chaps," his trio of Mephistophelian winks and his superfluous polishing of his head.

He had made such an entrance on a certain afternoon in early winter, and the sunlight that poured through the windows was not brighter than his smile of rapture on perceiving that his friends were in just the mood to bid him welcome. As a matter of fact, McLaren, always generous, was in the act of inviting the entire editorial force to become his guests. "Bravo, Captain," was his cheery greeting, "you're just in time."

"Then I'm glad I stawted out just when I did," replied the Captain, sagely.

"Trust *you!*" snapped the Commodore from his chair, sneering and blinking at the same time, "I believe you can sniff an invitation like Mac's from your studio in Fourteenth Street."

"Of cawse I can, dear chap," admitted the Briton, not a whit offended, "but I could sniff the high-balls you've had to-day fawther yet if I tried."

The Commodore blinked very rapidly at this sally and the others laughed. There were present two of the regular outside contributors, the writer of the paper's weekly literary reviews, a fat, jolly person who could murder a comic song as remorselessly as he could flay the author of a new book, and a certain witty paragrapher of high renown whose incurable cynicism was, as he himself confessed, mainly due to a recalcitrant liver. These two joined the flank movement on "Del's." As the procession filed through the outer office in a sort of lock-step, with the Commodore marching and blinking bravely ahead and McLaren and Gaunt bringing up the rear, Colonel Plum glanced up from his desk, gave utterance to a belligerent snort and seemed about to protest. A calm glance from McLaren caused him to sink back into his chair, from which he had half risen. Such a glance from McLaren invariably made the Major look limp. He now gazed longingly after the procession, without inviting himself to accompany it.

"I wonder," hazarded the Cynical Paragrapher, as the bottles and glasses were being placed on the table, "what this town would do without the beautiful and abiding consolation of—Rum."

"Don't know," admitted the Literary Reviewer, helping himself to Scotch whisky, "there'd be no *Fang* published, for one thing."

"Oh, come, that's too severe," laughed McLaren, "I admit I write a little better under stimulants, but as for their being indispensable—"

"There'd be no yotting notes, anyway,—te-he!" chuckled the Captain.

"Or pictures painted of the Major, I suppose," retorted the Commodore. "Daubs, rather," he added, with many blinks. "On my word, Captain, that painting of yours of

the old man is a sight. The flesh-tinting is beastly, and the whiskers look as if they had been shot at."

"Well, that's maw than they were in the waw, eh?" was the smart response; and everybody roared.

The day was perfect and the crowd in the street dense. The Broadway "parade" was at its best—that brilliant human outpouring, famous for its pretty women and for the complacency with which great lawyers and clergymen stroll cheek-by-jowl with the confidence men and declassés whom they respectively convert and defend. As a spectacle, this Broadway parade still had some charm for Gaunt—he had not then learned to prefer that of Fifth Avenue—and it was pleasant to view it thus, through the windows, with an acceptably filled glass at his elbow, and then turn to listen to the equally brilliant conversation going on about him.

"I don't wish to discourage you, McLaren," averred the Commodore, kindly, "but the various editors of *The Fang* in times past have been more or less celebrated as distillery-supporters. I shouldn't like to see you go that way. Why, I remember"—he stopped abruptly and blinked at his glass until a waiter re-filled it. (The awful incongruity of such solicitude failed to knock the plaster from the ceiling.)

"Oh, give us the story," commanded the Cynical Paragrapher, "you're a dandy Horrible Example yourself, Ellis; but we don't mind little things like glass houses and chucking rocks. Fire away—do!"

"I was only thinking," sighed the good old Commodore, "of a night on which I went to dine with your predecessor, McLaren—that big chap, Anthony, you know, from Philadelphia—at Everett Plum's house. Everett owned the paper in those days, you know, and he had the same habit as his brother, the Major—that of insisting on having every member of the staff dine with him at least once a week. Anthony and I started up town together—I was invited, too, worse luck!—and the way he hit things up was a caution.

We began at Kirk's with three cocktails and a cab, but Anthony discharged the cab at Forty-second Street because the driver wouldn't let him take the reins and climb on the roof, and things were a blank to Fifty-ninth Street, where we brought ourselves to with more cocktails—vermuth this time. Everett lived somewhere up in the eighties and Anthony decided it was too far to walk. We took a car—they were running horse-cars up Broadway in those days, if you remember—and when we dropped off at the right street, the catastrophe happened. The night was frosty and the pave slippery as glass. Up went Anthony's heels and down went he, heavily, on the reverse side of his brisket. He is, as you know, a man large of frame, but I managed to get him to his feet. He was uninjured, but you couldn't say that of his trousers, for they were split from east to west in a ludicrous fashion. I got him into a café near by, where as luck would have it there was a Hebrew peddler from whom I bought a lot of safety-pins. I fastened my friend together, as I thought, securely, and I insist to this day that he'd have been all right if he hadn't had a habit, when drunk, of becoming so confoundedly ceremonious. As it was, when we reached the house, he treated every lady in the company to a low bow; and with every bow—r-r-r-r-rip! went a safety-pin, and down went my heart into my boots for dread. Nobody noticed, though, and Everett, when I told him what the matter was, laughed till he nearly dislocated his jaws. Afterwards, he took Anthony upstairs and lent him a pair of his own trousers to go home in. He was an ideal host."

This was a rather long speech for the Commodore and was not accomplished without much nodding and blinking. When he had finished he refreshed himself with a long draught, and beamed his appreciation of the company's mirth.

"That same Anthony was a cool fish, though," volunteered the Cynical Paragrapher, in tones that suggested admiration as well as conviction, "and I remember one

time that his coolness saved him, and perhaps the entire staff, from a wicked mauling. It was some years ago—just after you'd gone back to Chicago after your first stay here, Gaunt. The paper had been making some very severe attacks on Phil June, who, as you know, had a tremendous reputation as a fighter, as well as a man-about-town and beau. There were three or four particularly savage paragraphs—any one of them sufficient to start a fairly irascible man on the war-path with a horsewhip. Well, June got the horsewhip all right, and up to the office he floundered, primed for trouble. The first man he encountered was Everett, who saw him coming, but too late to get out of the way. 'Sir,' began Phil, flicking his boot suggestively with the whip, 'I want to know who is responsible for those d—d paragraphs in your pestiferous paper about me.' 'Aw-really,' replied Everett, steadying his nerves with a mighty effort, 'you will find the managing editor on the floor above, Mr. June, and he will give you all the information you desire.' Scowling fiercely, the trouble-hunter turned about and ploughed his way upstairs. Everett fled across to the Bartholdi Hotel and watched to see the roof of the building blow off. (By the way, I never knew the publisher of a newspaper to put up a fight; he always shoves it off on the editor.) I happened to be upstairs in the editorial rooms at the time. So did Snare, the musical critic. Anthony sat at his desk in a corner, with his back to the door, his broad shoulders looming up beautifully. At the first sight of the aggressive Mr. June and his horsewhip, Snare walked rather nervously to the door and tiptoed off down the hall. He is a small man, and June allowed him to pass. He came straight for me, and flicking his boot once more with the whip, announced, in a sledge-hammer voice, 'I've come here to find out who is responsible for those blanked paragraphs about me in your paper.'

"I looked at him. I also looked over at Anthony, and saw that he was keenly alive to the situation, though he never moved an inch. 'Sir,' I said, with dignity, and with

an inward chuckle at my own astuteness, for I thought Anthony was big enough to at least begin the fight, 'there is the managing editor. He can give you all necessary information.'

"By not so much as a quiver did Anthony notice my adroit shifting of the burden to his broad shoulders. With heavy step and an ominous glare in his eye, the most athletic clubman of his day walked across that room, still slashing at his boot with the whip. By his manner you could see he felt certain he had his man cornered. When he reached the corner he stopped, and demanded: 'Where, sir, is the man who wrote those paragraphs about me?'

"I could hear myself breathe as I waited. After perhaps ten seconds of profound silence Anthony looked up from his writing, turned about in his chair, and replied, with a deep sob in his voice, 'He's dead.'

"'Dead!' exclaimed the caller, in a daze, 'when did he die?' I was choking but I managed to conceal the fact.

"'Last night,' replied Anthony, solemnly; 'those paragraphs were the last he ever wrote.' And he bowed his head on his arms, on the desk and caused his shoulders to heave with his sobs.

"Now, nobody ever licked a weeping man. June looked foolish for a minute. 'He's dead, is he?' he said, finally, 'well, if he hadn't been, I'd have killed him.' And out he strode, still flourishing the whip. He had been gone half-an-hour, maybe, and Anthony and I had finished our laugh, when Everett came in, grinning and trying to look jaunty. 'Well, boys,' said he, 'wha' d'ye tell him?' 'I told him,' said I plumply—for I really thought it was a shame to put us in peril—'that you wrote the paragraphs yourself and he's gone uptown to wait for you at your house.' Poor Everett was always a nervous man and he turned as white as chalk. I don't believe he went home for a week."

"There was another time, you know," spoke up the Commodore, his loquacity again whetted by his friend's recital, "when the paper was raided by the authorities for some

reason or other. There wasn't anything so very funny about that event; except, I remember that a rather nice old man—a good-natured old chap with blue spectacles and palpably false teeth—had been hired that morning as a clerk or book-keeper. 'Well, how d'ye like it?' I asked him, on my way out to lunch. 'Oh,' he answered, rubbing his hands, 'they haven't asked me to do anything yet. I find it pretty slow.' The dear old fossil. In just one hour half of the staff were arrested and the other half hustling for bail for them. The old chap doubtless found it swift enough for him by that time."

With the story-telling the afternoon shadows had lengthened and the lights and decorations of the famous café looked even more inviting than the still crowded street. McLaren was holding up his glass of Rhine wine to the light, that he might scan its golden globules. "I always," he said, "regard this hour as the sprightliest of the day. With one's work done, and nothing on one's mind, how pleasant this is." He sipped his wine. "Which brings us back again to the query, does it not?—what would there be in life, for brain-workers at least, without the delightful and all-consoling influence of—Rum?"

"Don't talk that way, boy!" implored the Cynical Paragrapher, rather nervously, "we all know our failings. It is unkind to twit us with them. Why should one stop to investigate causes, when the effects are so desirable?"

"I know all about that," persisted the editor, "but it's curious, to say the least. Look at all these men about us—clean-cut, well-groomed fellows, every one of them. They all feel just as we do. And there are hundreds of places in New York where the same industry is being carried on at this selfsame minute. Where is the fascination, I ask? Do we drink in order to feel comfortable, or do we feel comfortable only because we drink?"

"I fawncy I drink," vouchsafed the Captain, waking up, "because it's so beastly good, don't you know?"

All laughed. The Commodore looked thoughtful. "I

think the Captain and I must have learned the trick on the sea," said he, "salt water always creates a thirst. How about you, Gaunt?" And he blinked his eyes kindly.

The young man from Chicago was looking thoughtful. "I think," he answered slowly, "that the most of us like to drink because to do so makes us forget distressing things and remember agreeable ones. In my own case—"

He stopped abruptly, but as no one was listening very closely, his pause failed to excite remark. Looking through the window into the darkening street, he had beheld an apparition. A figure clad in becoming winter garb, with a circular mass of violets at its belt, had passed by and the two large eyes in its white face had stared for an instant straight into his own. He shivered as he turned to his friends:

"—I am reminded," he said, as if completing his sentence, "that there is something distressing I wish to forget now. I want some champagne and I will wager a bottle of it that within ten minutes a man named George Scott will walk into this room."

"You could make it ten seconds and win," laughed McLaren, who knew the man so named, "for here he comes now."

The young theatrical manager, roundfaced and cheery, came up to the table and shook hands with his friend. "I say, old boy," he whispered, leaning over him confidently, "I've just seen an old flame of yours. Gad, but she looked stunning."

"I saw her myself," replied Gaunt. "And," he added, "if you'll sit down and shut up, I'll give you some of my champagne, when it comes. If you don't I shall hit you with the bottle."

CHAPTER XXIII

ON THE TOSS OF A COIN

On a certain Tuesday night, having dined from a menu of some excellence, Mr. Eustace Gaunt found himself treading Broadway in the direction of *The Fang* office. To be precise, some hours had passed since he had risen from the table, and these had been passed in the presence of friends, and so very agreeably, that the pulsing main-artery of New York's life had never looked so pleasant. To be sure, the lights in the windows were a little disconcerting and the cable-cars scuttering by had a vague, topsy-turvy look; but the sidewalk was not crowded and for that reason it was not necessary to move upon it in an exact mathematical line. The atmosphere was just crisp enough to render a walk in the night air exhilarating.

The largeness of soul that is the direct effect of a tight stomach and a dulled mind was strong upon the young man. He was on his way to a hard night's work, true; but he felt that he was equal to it, and in his present mood felt like asking odds of no living person. A leading theater was dismissing its audience as he approached and at the edge of the sidewalk some small commotion was noticeable. Two ladies, in the act of entering a hansom, had been accosted by a strange man and were evidently in distress. Gaunt could not have helped interfering if he had wished, for as he stepped up the curious crowd closed about him and hemmed him in. He discovered to his surprise that one of the ladies was the Major's daughter and the other her plump and pleasing friend, Miss Trenton. The haze disappeared from his brain and he became alert.

Miss Trenton was already in the cab and Miss Plum, pardonably nervous, had a foot on the step. Assisting her

into the vehicle with one hand the young man was able with the other to administer only a very slight blow—it was really no more than a push—to the fellow who, with strange pertinacity, still insisted on being noticed. To Gaunt's amazement, the man went down as if he had been shot, leaving him free to make a hurried inquiry of Miss Plum and guided by her reply, to give her father's office address to the cabman. As the vehicle rolled away, he turned to look for the enemy he had so easily routed. The latter, whom some bystander had helped to his feet, showed no disposition toward further argument and lumbered unsteadily away. He must have been far gone, indeed, to have collapsed beneath such very mild punishment.

The incident rather heightened the conqueror's good nature than otherwise. He swelled out his chest—a habit he was unconsciously learning from the Major—and lit a fresh cigar. He also stopped at Delmonico's for a final revivifier before facing his fellow-laborers and the night's toil.

At the office he found the Major wrestling into his great fur coat, feebly assisted by the two girls. A triangular rush was made for him as he entered.

"My b-b-b-boy!" half sobbed the old soldier, clutching his hand in both of his own; "my br-r-r-rave b-b-boy! So you knocked the cussed ruffian down, eh? Gad, I wish you'd 'a killed him! Waugh!"

"Indeed, sir," expostulated the hero, who had been nearly overturned by the affectionate assault; "I did nothing—positively nothing—"

"I know better, cuss you!" roared the Major amiably. "Hasn't Ducks, here, told me?"

"Ducks," with beaming face, turned to pat her vociferous papa's cheek fondly and whisper words of approval in his ear. During this ceremony, Gaunt stood by, trying hard to look serious and, to tell the truth, swaying slightly. Miss Trenton turned on him with a kittenish movement. "Been dining, I see, Mr. Gaunt," she half whispered, roguishly,

"but don't you care. The Major has, too. See him fumble Agnes. I declare I believe he thinks she's me."

The Assistant Editor grinned appreciatively and succeeded in retaining his dignity and his equilibrium. With a final laudation of his subordinate's superb act of courage the Major marched from the office with a fair one on either arm, vowing in terrible tones that he would work no more that night for the best man living. His victorious waugh-waughing lasted from the top to the bottom of the elevator shaft.

In the inner office the only man at work was the musical critic, who was writing away as busily as though engaged in composing his regular weekly resignation. McLaren had gone to a theater and was late.

Gaunt sat down before his own desk, elevating his feet upon it, and began striking lightly at defenseless objects, such as paste-jars and piles of manuscript, with his stick.

"Hello!" exclaimed the chronic resigner, cheerily, without looking up; "what's the matter? Nervous after the battle?"

"Battle?" repeated the successful gladiator, drowsily and with his hat over his eyes; "what battle?"

"Don't be so modest"—this with freezing sarcasm—"why man, I sat here and listened to the gory tale, told breathlessly by two charming mouths at once, and my warped soul fairly glowed at the recital of such valor. Say, boy, when is the valorous prince to wed the rescued princess, hay?"

"Oh, shut up!" growled Gaunt; "there's a limit to everything, isn't there?"

"There ought to be," was the tart reply, "but in some cases—"

A uniformed messenger came plunging in and interrupted the speaker by handing him a note. He glanced at the address and tossed it over to his young friend, observing airily, "Billet for you from the Major. Bet you two dollars you're invited to supper with Rescued Beauty."

"Done!" acquiesced Gaunt, breaking the envelope. After reading the scrawl he walked over to the critic's desk and laid down the money.

"Dear G——," the Major had written, "we're over at the Brunswick, getting an oyster. Come over and join us, like a good fellow."

The recipient of the invitation stood irresolute. "Well," demanded the critic, with a smirk, as he pocketed the two dollars, "aren't you going?"

"Don't know," replied Gaunt, still with his hat over his eyes; "I fancy I've had as much as is good for me, but I'll be shot if I feel like working."

"Toss up a coin," suggested the other, "and let that decide it."

"Good!" ejaculated the cheerful inebriate. "Heads I go; tails I don't." He spun a half-dollar and it fell on the desk with a bang. "Heads it is, and there you go," he added, tossing the coin to the messenger. "'Tis Kismet, I suppose. I am fated to do no work to-night, even if I wished to, which I don't." He implored as he went out: "Square me with Mac if he comes in. I'll be back as soon as I can."

It was, as I have said, a sharp night, and the café of the now deserted Brunswick looked warm and inviting. The gleaming chandeliers and the spotless table napery voiced the luxury of civilization. A sleek waiter, whose large feet made no sound on the thick carpet, was on the look-out for Gaunt and duly escorted him to Major Plum's corner.

The gallant old warrior was by this time in his most magnificent mood. "Ah-h-h-h!" he ejaculated, rising to greet the newcomer as boisterously as if he had not seen him for twenty years, and attracting the attention of every one in the restaurant thereby, "you're just in time, my boy, just in time. See! we were ready for you!"

The evidence of readiness was unmistakable. It consisted of a large, sallow drink in a tall glass and a platterful of most tempting Lynn Havens. These dainties faced a

vacant chair at Miss Plum's side of the table into which the young man sank with great satisfaction. Little Miss Trenton sat opposite, and her mischievous, beady eyes laughed and winked provokingly.

The Major, joyous as a schoolboy over the completion of his party—he was never so happy as when dispensing hospitality in public—insisted on having champagne with his oysters, and became rebellious when his daughter remonstrated. "I should like to know when I can have champagne," he grumbled, "if I can't have it when I'm with my itty birdy-wirdy." And he pushed his great fist against the dimple in Miss Trenton's chin and languished at her horribly.

"Papa," announced Miss Plum, with the gravity of profound conviction, "your brain is softening."

"I know it, Ducks," assented the old gentleman meekly, "or I should not be treating you so well. Hey there, young Sobersides," he continued jovially, turning on his employe, "say something witty, why don't you?"

Gaunt returned the challenging glance without dread. He had finished his vermuth, his oysters and half a pint of champagne, and was beginning to feel as if the hotel in which he sat had just been deeded to him by the management. He was in no mood to swallow bluster. "Oh, waugh, Major!" he replied, inflating his cheeks and emptying them with a very fair imitation of the great chief's manner, "why don't you look after your own 'itty birdy-wirdy' and leave me to attend to mine?"

Miss Plum sat up straight in her chair and turned white. She flashed on Gaunt a look full of realization. The Major, all his gayety gone, simply glared. Miss Trenton, who was totally unaffected by the wine she had drunk, looked amused.

A cluster of violets that Miss Plum was wearing fell from her corsage to her lap. Gaunt leaned over and, with some difficulty, replaced it. To reward him, the lady plucked a spray of the odorous blossoms from the bunch and pinned them in the lapel of his coat.

At this the Major appeared to altogether lose control of himself. His face turned purple. He leaned across the table, and laying his clenched fist upon it, remarked with desperate fierceness, in low tones, "This strikes me as deuced familiar."

"Me, too," twittered Miss Trenton.

Gaunt never forgave the young lady for that pert interjection. It seemed to him, afterwards, as if the taunting tone, and the challenge contained in it, were largely responsible for his own failure to estimate consequences. But whatever the cause, there came to him, just at that moment, an intense and overmastering weariness of the Major's perpetual counterfeit wrath. So he looked across the table, squarely into the old gentleman's eyes and drawled, impudently, "Does it?"

"I think," murmured Miss Plum, with an odd little quaver in the tones, "that Mr. Gaunt and I understand each other."

"Do you, Mr. Gaunt?" teased Miss Trenton, pertly.

There was a breathless silence, broken only by the tinkling of the Major's oyster fork, as it dropped from his nerveless fingers into the chopped ice and empty shells on his plate. The bearder of the lion took another glance into that well-fed military countenance and again its comic-opera fury irritated him. "Ya-as," he drawled, defiantly.

A glow like that of a furnace flashed into the old warrior's face. He could not speak, but leaped from his chair, and sprinting around to Gaunt's side of the table made a frantic attempt to kiss him. The assault was prevented with difficulty, the old man finally contenting himself with wringing the young one's hands till they ached. Miss Trenton giggled. Miss Plum kept her eyes modestly fixed on her violets. The departure from the restaurant, which for at least one member of the quartette was spinning round and round, was effected amid confusion.

On his way back to the office, some time later, Gaunt attracted attention from the belated pedestrians that he passed. He was staring before him with a white face, and at every few steps laughed immoderately.

CHAPTER XXIV

A DELUGE OF DINNERS

It was arranged that the marriage should take place in Florida. In an interior county of that sultry state Major Plum possessed an orange farm of some pretensions, decked with a stately modern mansion and operated by a horde of the blackest and laziest negroes in the world. Having expended large sums of money in the effort to beautify a vast tract of irredeemable swamp land, he considered that he had every right to claim the place as his home; which claim no one had yet shown the least desire to dispute.

The engagement of Miss Plum naturally provoked some excitement in *The Fang* office, and the manifest awe with which he immediately came to be regarded by the employes in the business department was not displeasing to Gaunt. The business manager contrived every day to display his desire to be considered his friend for life; and the cashier, ordinarily a most discreet and non-committal person, intimated more than once that he could have whatever advance he chose on his salary. The other editors and contributors proffered their congratulations in due course and with more or less enthusiasm. McLaren, who was away from the office a good deal about this time, felicitated his subordinate in graceful language and smilingly assured him that it was his intention to resign immediately after the wedding, in order to make room for him.

Aside from the contemplation of his own thoughts, Gaunt's most trying ordeal at this time lay in the enthusiasm of his future father-in-law. Since the event of the formal betrothal, the Major's always plentiful stock of high spirits had expanded and developed until his best friends scarcely knew him. He lived in a rosy realm of cerebral effervescence, and was constantly inviting his friends to tell

him how happy a man he ought to be. He spent the greater part of each day loudly dictating to a stenographer letters bearing in some way on the approaching ceremonial—an occupation distinctly disconcerting to the bridegroom-to-be, toiling industriously at his desk in the next room. He shook hands on the smallest provocation with any one and every one, and his boisterous laugh and his explosive waugh-waughs were heard at all hours. The Major, in short, was as joyous as a schoolboy and was quite indifferent as to the number of persons who became aware of the fact.

As for the two chief culprits themselves, they were entitled to sympathy, so industriously were they, as the Captain facetiously expressed it, "fattened faw the sacwifice." Such a round of feasting has preceded the consummation of few matrimonial alliances in the present century, and if the prospective bridegroom's system did not give way under the strain, his escape was doubtless due to the long and steady training through which he had passed under the coaching of the Major. He afterwards viewed this period of his life through a phantasmagoria of dinners and a mist of champagne.

If he had been asked his precise reasons for binding himself to marry, he would have been as incapable of answering, as he had proved himself of behaving, with intelligence. He could acquit himself of any mercenary motive; for he knew that the Major, barring the income from his paper, which he dissipated with undeviating prodigality, was very little better off than himself. Of another motive, he was possibly not so innocent. The idea of eventually shaping the editorial policy of a very powerful newspaper was one that appealed to him strongly—when he found time to consider anything of the kind, which was seldom. As a matter of fact, the celerity with which events had shaped themselves had left little time for self-study or analysis. To him, the situation in which he found himself seemed so odd, and so impossible of alteration, that speculation upon

mere causes appeared superfluous. If he had taken the trouble to study his mind closely, he would have discovered that he was swayed by an incentive not at all unusual, and doubtless very despicable—the desire to pique one person by marrying another. There had never been a day since the one that had marked his separation from his wife that he had not desired a reconciliation with her. The final conviction that such an event was impossible had brought him much bitterness. His present amusement, in the thought of the surprise that the news of his engagement would create in Chicago, was continuous and intense. He had an absurd idea that this marriage with his publisher's daughter would, in the eyes of his former friends, redound in some way to his credit, and the knowledge that these friends would in all probability account him the happiest, if not the most fortunate, of men, brought him a certain cynical satisfaction.

Still, to be exact, there were times when this state of mind deserted him, and at such times he could not lay claim to any very solid foundation for hope of future peace. During the day, with work and kindred interests to divert him, his passing glances at the situation failed to affect him disagreeably, and the evening, which commenced invariably with a dinner at the Major's hotel and ended with a towering stirrup-cup of whisky-punch, usually left him with little ambition beyond his bath and his bed. The period of reaction that he found most eloquent was that which lay between the hours of his waking and rising. Sleep, which had acquired a way of deserting him about five o'clock in the morning, left him quite unrefreshed, and his reflective faculties were possibly rendered the more acute by reason of the dulling process to which they had been subjected for the preceding twenty hours. In such a period, a brain unsupported by stimulants is a hard taskmaster. The fabric of disordered fancy is ruthlessly stripped from the actual, and the mind, in its brief rational interval, is compelled to confront facts.

The season of sober (I will not say calm) reflection the early morning was the only blot upon the otherw cheerful escutcheon of the victim's indifference to life. a mere study, a scientist would have found Gaunt's mei condition interesting at this time. With a few rare exc tions, there had been no specific occasion, during the t years of his residence in New York, when he had ov drank; but his devotion to the cheering influence of w had been fairly consistent. He did not realize it hims but he had reached a point where a certain amount of st ulant each day was essential to the preservation of an ec ble nervous system. This would not have been the case course, if his mental organism had not been wrung, dur the entire two years, by the memory of irreparable disa and confronted at their close with a climax as mystify as it was grave. This one hour of rational thought, in a and night of indifference, is one of the pranks that I plays upon minds disordered by idleness or indulge One effect of wine upon intellects confronted with gr moral problems is to provide them with solutions in di antagonism to fact and right. It puts upon the subje intelligence so fine and rare an edge that he has no d culty in arguing himself into a belief in the propriety anything he may be doing, or that he may have done, si the beginning of his life. It justifies every extravagance surrounds emotional eccentricity with a halo of roman It lends to the infliction of a wrong the aspect of one dured. So, from this influence, Gaunt drew his toleral of life—of circumstances—of himself. Without verg upon grossness, in the extent of his indulgence, he m aged to so regulate it as to supply himself with the requi amount of counterfeit reason to preserve him from a rec nition of truth. As long as he gave the Major delight the acceptance of his lavish liquid hospitality, he could claim to a certain degree of mental peace. He could only stifle regret, but could coax himself into the convict that he was really dealing Providence a rather artistic

quital for the severe punishment executed upon himself two years before. It was only in that one ghastly morning hour of reflection and abstinence that existence seemed unendurable.

To his fiancée he had reason to feel grateful. She was not exacting. Then, too, they were alone together so little that neither had the opportunity to weary the other with civil platitudes. For the array of fluttering girlhood rallied around Miss Plum with an enthusiasm that touched that lady's happy parent deeply. Miss Dearthing, Miss Pallon and Miss Trenton hovered about the Major's hotel like birds of bright plumage, solicitously seeking the opportunity to confer favors. Miss Dearthing had been promised the position of maid of honor and her exhibitions of maidenly sympathy were perhaps the more pronounced on that account. One or more of these fair flutterers were generally numbered among the guests at the nightly dinner-parties with which the Major generously celebrated the approaching event. Dinners these were, as elaborate as they were incessant, their prodigality being only equaled by the inexhaustible flow of high spirits and good humor with which this matchless old host accompanied the consumption of his own viands. The herds of kine, the droves of deer, the flocks of canvas-back duck consumed at the Major's table in the course of one short month in that hotel would have fed a city in a siege.

There was one event that agreeably varied the savage monotony of this round of dinners—a Hunt Club ball at the big hotel over in Staten Island, to which the members of the happy bridal family were invited at the instigation of the Lighthouses. It was as festive as such affairs usually are, and the gaiety of the sight brought, for a few brief hours, forgetfulness of many things. There was a dinner first, of course—Heavens! if there had not been, would the affair have been worth while?—at which the champagne flowed in rivers; and the scene in the ballroom, later, with the men in red coats and the women fitly begemmed, was sufficiently

brilliant and charmingly eastern. It reminded Gaunt of that farewell festal night in Chicago, when he had admired Mrs. Neinstein's "imborted French brokate," made Flyburton nervous and enjoyed a piratical dance with little Miss Meek-eyes. It was on a New Year's eve, and, being absolved from over-much dancing duty by reason of his fiancée's popularity, he was at liberty to lounge near a great window and revel in the superb view of the bay, with its myriads of twinkling lights. And when the clocks struck twelve, and the whistles in the harbor screeched and the joyous spirits in the ball-room struck up "Auld Lang Syne," it seemed to the moping misanthrope by the window as though 'twould be a sin not to grow gay with the rest; notwithstanding that there was a sledge-hammer of retrospection beating at the base of his brain and a shrill voice squeaking in his ear—"Oh, won't your little hour of waking and of reflection in the morning be a sweet one!" But there was a supper coming—ah, dear me, yes, it was necessary to eat again! We high livers of the East never like to starve, and least of all at a ball!—and at the supper there was more champagne, and enough hilarity to drown any number of still, small voices. And once, when the jollity was at its height, Gaunt turned and detected the gentle eyes of good Mrs. Lighthouse fixed, with all the eloquence of unutterable love—upon her own husband! And the originality of that admirable lady's mood almost compensated him for the queerness of his own. So, after all, the ball was not a bore.

Blithe and gladsome period, it was, of feasting and of frolic, deliriously swift in its passage and its ecstasy tempered only by that desperate little wakening hour of enforced contemplation of fact. And it was crowned, at the end, with so prodigious and magnificent a climax as might well excite the wonder of men and of gods. Prime master in the princely art of dinner-giving, the valiant Major topped his steaming succession of dinners with one in his new-found son-in-law's honor, at his club, that fairly broke the records. Far be it from this helpless pen to attempt to

picture that stupendous feast in detail. Suffice it, that 'twas spread in the private banquet-room of the club, and there was grouped about the circular board as fine and rare an assortment of grizzled warriors as ever met to wage war with honest meat. They were army friends of the Major's for the most part; brave men and true, who had faced cannon-shot in their day and were not afraid, in their time of stiffening joints and whitening locks, to lead the assault on the highest haunch of venison that ever hung or the biggest cheval-de-frise of bottles that ever waved. There were some modest civilians, too. Plump little McLaren (whom Gaunt could scarcely look in the face in these days, for the thought of supplanting him) laughed and chuckled in his place opposite his host; and the Cynical Paragrapher and the Literary Reviewer were there also, each in fine fettle, and prepared to poke fun at warriors, and provender into themselves, from midnight to morning. Captain Clapham's bald head beamed beside the Reviewer's gray one, and his tongue wagged blithely as his jaws. And oh, when the signal was given and the attack began!—was ever such gallant feasting seen since the days of Saxon and Dane? Out with the trenchers there, you varlets, and off with the necks of those bottles! The bottles, the bottles!—dear, dear, how the bottle-scarred veterans punish 'em! And anon the Major rises, in response to a toast to his own health, to propose that of his son-in-law-to-be. "Mumm-m-m-waugh!" groans he, at the wind-up, and his voice dies away at the bottom of his goblet in the excess of his feeling. And the groom-to-be, rising with a white face (for who would not feel an honest trepidation before the critical view of all that warrior-host?) to make his own address, meets the laughing gaze of McLaren, and the cynical one of the Paragrapher, across the heaps of roses and orchids that mass the board, and experiences a momentary faintness in consequence. But the ordeal is faced somehow; something graceful is said about the unutterable bliss of marriages that are made in Heaven and

every warrior of the lot votes the new son-in-law a prime good fellow who can drain a bowl with the best of 'em and keep a clear tongue in his head at that. And then? Why then more toasting, more bliss, and anon singing, interspersed with stories that are none too nun-like—for such, alas! is the way of warriors when charged with o'ermuch that is excellent in the way o' meat and drink. Those last good-nights of the warriors, lubricated with tears and garnished with great oaths! the final benediction of the Major, teeming with joviality and staccatoed with "waughs!"—who shall say that the wind-up of the celebration was not its most pleasant feature? Captain Clapham, at least, thought so; for he became very devout when leaving the club, and went home in a hansom, praying into his hat (as all good Englishmen do) just as if he were in church. The one blemish on the night was the absence of the Commodore, who had been duly invited, but who failed either to appear or to send his excuses. To this day no man knows where he spent the time, but regrets were heard on every hand that he was not present to assist in regulating the Captain's conduct.

The event of this final dinner fixed itself rather firmly upon the memory of the guest of honor by reason of the oddness of two encounters that immediately followed it. Within half-an-hour of its conclusion, he had met two old acquaintances. The first was that queer little conundrum, Marie St. Judas.

He had stopped at the Normandie, on his way to his rooms, to refill his cigarette case. It was just midnight, and as he was turning to leave the hotel, he heard the quick patter of light soles on the marble floor and the next instant saw the little impish face of the clever writer looking up into his own.

The little impish face opened and spoke. "How do you do, Mr. Gaunt?" it asked, gravely.

The man made no reply. He felt dazed. The sight of

er smart little ladyship had provoked a bewildering train f reminiscence.

Her next words came bluntly: "I say, Eustace! Tell ıe why you are doing it."

For the life of him, Gaunt could not have explained the :nsation kindled by her words. It was one of bitter, un-:asoning resentment, born, perhaps, of a sudden recollec-on of all he had lost and heightened by the conviction ıat none but he deserved the blame he would gladly have ıouldered on some one else. The politest speech he could ame was: "Oh, go to the devil, you little harpy."

The impish face looked pained. "Oh, Mr. Gaunt," came ıe just expostulation, "*you* to be impolite to a lady! I 'ould never have believed it."

He pulled himself together. "You are right," he ad-ıitted, in the most deferential tone he could command, and I am extremely rude. I am 'doing it,'" he added, in lower voice, and with great impressiveness, "to save your ister from a great peril. With me out of the way, you now, she will be quite safe." He despised himself for the addishness of the remark, as he walked away, but the 'ine in his brain argued that the satire was justified. He oted, too, an entirely new expression in the impish little ıce of Mrs. Marie St. Judas. She actually looked sympa-ıetic. And that struck him as so funny that he was forced) laugh.

The second surprise awaited him at his own rooms, in 'hirty-seventh Street. As he entered, he perceived a strong ght coming from his bedroom. Investigation showed Mr. :obert Lee Romney lying comfortably in bed, a perfecto ı his mouth and a tall glass on a chair at his elbow, reading French novel. Gaunt had not seen his friend in a year, nd lost no time in expressing his pleasure.

"They told me you were out," explained the lank guest, ı his resonant bass, "so I thought I'd make myself con-:nted. There was a pretty little Irish serving-wench—too

pretty to be around where you are, you dog!—who rather objected to my staying. Rather think she took me for a burglar, or at least a tramp. The only way I could get rid of her was by going to bed. When she saw that my preparations were unmistakable she fled, vowing she hoped you'd shoot me. So here I am."

"Well, I'm glad of it," declared Gaunt, "but seeing that that's the only bed I've got, I don't suppose you'll mind getting out of it, will you?"

"Couldn't think of it," his friend assured him. "I know when I'm well off. Take the lounge if you're tired. For my part, I'm sleepy, too." He threw the book into a corner, dropped his half-smoked cigar into his glass and rolled over blissfully.

Whatever remark Gaunt was about to make died on his lips. He had glanced at the dressing table and he had seen there, a photograph—a new photograph, that shone and glistened in the gaslight. He picked it up. The features presented there were those of Elaine Gaunt, and at that moment they looked to him very beautiful. The face which he remembered so well, had scarcely changed, except that there was a trace of sadness about the eyes and mouth that seemed to have no business there. It was the picture, indeed, of a girl grown old too soon. He turned to the recumbent figure in the bed, and asked softly, "Where did you get this, Bob?"

"She gave it to me just before I left Chicago," answered the bass voice, sleepily, "I thought you'd like to see it. Don't bother me now, old chap. I'm so devilish sleepy."

He spoke without turning his head. It did not occur to Gaunt to wonder how his friend could have guessed what he meant by "this." As it was, he carefully lowered the light, in order that its glare might not disturb the sleeper, and then sat himself down, dressed as he was, by the window. The moon gave sufficient light to enable him to study the photograph from time to time, as the hours slipped by.

Once, while he was leaning back in the chair, with his

eyes closed and the picture loosely held in his hand, Mr. Robert Lee Romney, thoroughbred high stepper, society man, exquisite, and fearless fisticuff fighter, sat up suddenly in bed. He looked across at the dim figure by the window long and earnestly, and with great affection, before sinking back in his pillows, murmured, in a low bass, "Idiot!" and resumed his slumbers.

Gaunt, who did not hear him, continued his dreaming. During that night he aged some years.

CHAPTER XXV

THE COMMENCEMENT OF THE RECKONING

The Commodore walked up the gang-plank of the steamer with dignity. He bore as freight a large stone jug and a mountainous package of books. Captain Clapham almost shrieked in his bliss. "Aw, I say," he stuttered, "there's Ellis now. I told you he wouldn't forget the w-w-w-whiskey."

There were standing on the deck, at the time, in a group, Colonel Pace, a warrior on a pension, Mr. Frederick Cloud, a lawyer on a vacation, and Mr. Eustace Gaunt. Captain Clapham filled out the perspective admirably. Mr. Cloud was going to serve Gaunt in the capacity of best man. Colonel Pace was going because Major Plum had given him a ticket. The arrival of Commodore Ellis, laden as he was, gave rise to a chorus of jovial and heartfelt "ah-h-h-hs."

"Gentlemen," announced the Commodore, facing the quartette and blinking his eyes with the speed of a locomotive headlight in a gale, "in my present attitude I typify the advance of the British missionary into a country that requires civilization—a demijohn of whiskey in one hand and the Holy Bible in the other."

"To make the realism perfect," suggested Cloud, "you ought to have a couple of horse-pistols in your teeth."

"His eloquence would explode 'em," declared the Captain. And he coughed convulsively into the palm of his hand.

The Commodore looked severe; but his frown faded in a moment into a smile of indulgence. "Come into my stateroom," he urged, "and we'll see what sort of civilization it is that the demijohn holds." And Colonel Pace forthwith proved his right to his name.

The Commodore's stateroom was small, but its atmosphere speedily became hilarious. He was to share it with Gaunt, and that passenger was given the seat of honor on the lower berth during the ceremony of the broaching of the jug. It lacked but a few minutes of the hour of sailing, and the Captain announced to the Colonel, in a hoarse stage whisper, as the glasses were being passed, that a chap needed a little tonic, in a case like this, in order to get his sea-feet, whatever he meant by that. The "tonic," whatever its quality, speedily started the entire quintette to talking at once. At the second or third "bite," as he called it, the Commodore tightened his belt and beamed upon Captain Clapham in a manner that indicated the vanishing of criticism and the advent of generous rivalry. Lawyer Cloud at the same time ran his hand through his shock of handsome curls and declared his readiness to go to sea every day under such conditions. Colonel Pace, like other titled army friends of the Major, said little. He smiled and looked benevolent. As for the Captain, his cup of joy was already brimming. He perked his glass airily between his thumb and forefinger and began to warble a stave of the well-remembered ditty—

> From stawbawd to lawbawd aw'y we go—
> Heave-ho! Roll a man down!

in which Colonel Pace presently joined him. The prospect began to look pleasing.

"Gentlemen," said Gaunt. in accents of profound gloom,

from his seat on the berth, "I am tempted to break a rather firm rule of mine. If you have no objection, I think I will continue drinking with you indefinitely."

"Hooray, old chap!" applauded the Captain, "only don't look so beastly solemn about it. Be g'y! Be g'y! I say, fellows," he added, turning to appeal to the others, "considering what he's going to do, he's a right to drink, hasn't he?"

"He has!" came the chorus, heartily.

"It is the decree of this court," averred Lawyer Cloud, oracularly, "that the prisoner-to-be—he's going up for life, you know, ha! ha!—is not only invested with the personal and absolute right to 'drink indefinitely,' as he calls it, but he is *ordered* to drink indefinitely. This court decrees it. You, gentlemen of the jury, will see that the decree is enforced. Have I spoken wisely?"

A ringing war-whoop, in which Colonel Pace ceased his attentions to the jug long enough to permit him to join, greeted the judicial edict and the proceedings for the next ten minutes were chaotic. An adjournment to the deck was then proposed and carried. The Commodore fished from his bag a yachting-cap, with a patent-leather visor, weather-beaten and of wondrous design, and jammed it over his eyes aggressively. The Captain eyed him with concern. "Awn't you afraid of a list to port, old fellow," he inquired, "with all that top-hamper?" "No," replied the Commodore, blinking, "I carry outside ballast." He glanced at his feet and no more was said.

As the shorelines were cast off and the vessel edged her way into the icy East River, Gaunt found it impossible to account for the change in his spirits. He had a vivid recollection, at this very moment, of the hour of almost unbearable discontent he had passed through that morning—the hour after waking. It had seemed then as if his life were utterly without purpose or excuse and the feeling had clung to him since, even through the excitement of his preparations for leaving. The impatience, the restlessness,

the regrets of the last two years had culminated in the one torturing sense of supreme ennui. The power to reckon with himself had appeared to be drifting from him, and with it everything in life that was admirable, or beautiful, or clean. The transformation now effected by the spirits he had drunk, or by other causes that he could not define, was as refreshing as it was unlooked-for. Under this influence, productive as it was of a host of most picturesque imaginative effects, he was able to reason upon a line totally different to that which had so vexed him in that final hour of disheartening sobriety in the dawn. The whiskey pumping through his blood exercised the usual tilting process in his brain, enabling him, after its pleasant custom, to overturn facts and reverse the engines of reason. As the mammoth bridge and the lines of buildings began to recede from view, his spirit of generous tolerance of himself and his deeds grew stronger. He began to wonder if, after all, the past contained any tie or incident worthy of regret. He was able, presently, to argue himself into the conviction that every circumstance of his life that had operated to his disadvantage heretofore was the fault of any one rather than himself, and that Fate alone was responsible for undesirable conditions that his conduct had brought upon other people. It was Fate that had made him pick up Marie St. Judas' rascally little book; it was Fate that had brought him into contact with its author. Fate it was that had let Imogen Leal, with her saint's face and her picturesque fiction about her heart, steal his very soul from him in three short months; that had let a stupid little air from a silver cornet —he remembered that air yet!—associate itself in his mind with a dream too sweet for this dull world. Wrong Elaine? Ah, yes, that thought *would* come back, like a haunting and a curse, but, good God! had he not sought and sued, as no dying sinner ever sought or sued for salvation, for the right to atone? And had not the right been denied him? And was not Fate, in a measure, responsible for that

iniquity, too? Yes, it was; and by Saint Paul, this was no time for that puling regret or that womanish heart-ache, either! What room for regrets or heart-aches in a situation involving a flight from a latitude of snow and ice and bitter winds to one of sunlight and palm-trees and flowers—and brides? He had almost forgotten that; and his brain told him, or at least the whiskey told his brain to tell him (which was the same thing) that a great many men of intelligence would consider themselves very fortunate to be in his place. So that was his mood, and nothing in the world but the exhilarating drink was responsible for it. Now do you wonder that individuals blessed with the pleasant habit of retrospection, or cursed with consciences that they wish to argue to a standstill, find solace in strong drink?

"Hi there, old chap!" bellowed Captain Clapham, jovially, staggering over the deck on his short legs like a bull-terrier with the colic, "I've been looking faw you everywhere."

"Ya-as?" assented Gaunt, indolently, buttoning his reefer more closely round his neck, "what for?"

The Captain's eyes were moist with the cold, and a pear-shaped globule hung from his nose; but he managed to look roguish. He winked gravely, after his fashion when thrusting his bald pate through the doorway of *The Fang* editorial sanctum. "The sun's over the fore-yard," said he. The phrase was to be the watchword of the voyage. The two men linked arms and sought their three accomplices.

The steamer had poked her homely blunt nose across the bay in the teeth of a corking breeze, and she found half a gale ready to greet her beyond the Hook. The Commodore, who was seated in the smoking-room with his feet braced against the brass rim of the table, and the formidable yachting-cap tilted rakishly over one ear, announced cheerfully that they were in for "a little weather." "*A little!*" sniffed Lawyer Cloud, who was looking somewhat green about the gills, "the darned ship's turning somersaults now." "A little!" ejaculated Colonel Pace, valiantly, and with great ele-

gance, "if this is what you call 'a little,' Commodore, Lord knows I don't want no belly-full. Gimme some more Dutch courage."

"I think," submitted the Captain, veering to leeward when released from Gaunt's steadying grasp upon his elbow, "I think its dayvilish pore taste to talk about the doings of the wind and the wawtah when what I want's whiskey." He made two tacks and reached the table broadside on, with a bump. The demijohn had given place to a decanter, which was less cumbersome and much better bred. The Captain helped himself, and was content. His eyes danced and the polish on his forehead became more brilliant. "Here's at you, me old cockatoo," he chirped blithely to the Commodore, as he tipped his glass.

"I should think, Clapham," asserted the latter, with some severity, "that your elbow would need oiling; you bend it so often."

The Captain looked mystified for a moment and then laughed much more loudly than was necessary. His mirth was infectious, and all the others began to laugh with him, for no reason whatever except that when five strong men are at sea in a smoking-room with a decanter of whiskey on the table, many things that would seem commonplace enough under ordinary circumstances strike them as preposterously funny. The laughter for the next hour was continuous. A close student of masculine frailties would have found food for thought in the frequency with which the pronoun "I" came into use as the circuit of the decanter became more speedy; for, as drink will indubitably bring out a man's strongest characteristic, and as every man's strongest characteristic is vanity, the explanations of each of these five, as to his own individual greatness, were equally extensive and emphatic. Not infrequently, all five found themselves talking at once, in which case some little confusion reigned until two of them paused to take breath or a drink. In such cases the voice of Captain Clapham, which, when keyed and hardened by a conscientious session

with the bottle, became as penetrating and unanswerable as the quacking of a duck, usually wore down the others; but the Captain no sooner discovered that he had the floor to himself than his tones died down to a whisper about nothing in particular. Whether this was due to modesty, or to a mere inability to say anything intelligent when certain he had an audience, could not be determined, but his friends found the habit disappointing. As a matter of fact, in any convivial party, there is something very maddening in the conduct of the gentleman who insists on talking when every one else wishes to do so:—who succeeds in his aim simply by virtue of superior nasal resonance and then finds himself in possession neither of the ability to say anything nor of the desire to be listened to if he had it. His conduct creates in every other would-be orator a bitter sense of personal wrong, because of the certainty each one feels that he could have acquitted himself so admirably in the offender's place. The Captain, however, while he lost in this way many splendid opportunities of his own, did not altogether kill the science of self-exploitation in the others. Before the ending of that hour or so of generous commingling of congenial spirits, some very remarkable revelations had been made. Every participant was a beneficiary, in that he learned some things that he never knew before. It was proved, for instance, on the uncontradicted testimony of that gentleman himself, that Mr. Frederick Cloud was a lawyer who had only to name his own time for his acceptance of the Chief Justiceship of the United States Supreme Court. On evidence equally irrefutable, Commodore Ellis proved that if he had not slept in whales' bellies, he had at least harpooned them in the Arctic Seas; Captain Clapham showed that the British government had been guilty of a grievous error of judgment in not placing him at the head of its navy; Mr. Eustace Gaunt had successfully demonstrated the superiority of his verses over those of the Laureate, and Colonel Pace that it was he who, single-handed, won the battle of Gettysburg. The other occupants of the

room were very ordinary-looking persons, who gazed at the high-spirited five in something very like awe at first, but who stole away one by one, wild-eyed and marvelling, as the stories and the motion of the ship became equally heartrending.

For they were now having, as the Commodore had hinted, "a little weather." They had ploughed into it immediately on reaching the open sea and Lawyer Cloud's expression of "somersaults" exactly described the steamer's behavior. All through this thrilling smoking-room debate, the wind had been rising, and you could now hear it tearing and racing in heavenly fashion across the decks. To those who love the sea there is no sweeter sound than this screeching of a gale over foam-capped billows, and its influence, added to that of the decanter and the jolly good fellowship, was sufficiently stimulating. The gaiety, in consequence, grew more boisterous. Even Colonel Pace, who had several times confided to Cloud, in a whisper, that while afraid of no possible peril on land, he had a secret distrust of the sea, laughed bravely when an extra heavy lurch of the ship brought the feet of the Commodore to the floor with a crash and sent the wonderful yachting-cap spinning among the glasses on the table. The Commodore looked surprised, for at that moment he had been leaning back with his eyes closed, dreaming of whales. "Whee-ee-ee-eeeee!" squealed Captain Clapham delightedly, springing to his feet with a courage born of ignorance of his condition, "didn't I tell you he was top-heavy?" Before the question could be answered to his satisfaction or that of any one else, he had proved his own lack of adequate ballast by pitching head-foremost into a receptable for smokers' superfluities. "Hurrah!" yelled Cloud, "heave-ho, roll a man down!" and in a moment the four survivors were tripping a measure about the fallen Briton, roaring the gallant nautical chant at the top of their voices:—

> From starboard to larboard, away we go,
> Heave-ho! Roll a man down!

he Commodore's eyes were full of ecstatic tears as h
ed his old friend to his feet, and the two were embra
each other with infinite affection, when through th
king of the wind sounded the crash of the dinner-gon
Hello!" observed the lawyer, who had regained his na
color with the exercise, "this is where we eat, is it?"
Yes," replied the Commodore, releasing the Captain al
ly, "and I'm glad of it. I could eat all the fish in th
ntic Ocean."
t seems to me," said Gaunt, a little unsteadily, "th
ig is an awful bore. What's the use of it when drinl
so much less trouble?"
Ya-as," sagely assented the Captain, "and the gru
s up so much room, don't you know."
e Commodore, however, insisted that dinner was to
l a thing to be missed, if only as a time-killer, and h
rades humored him in the whim. The descent to th
on was not made without difficulty. The Captain wa
led to traverse the short distance of deck that lay b
n the smoking-room and the companion-way on a
s, but was deterred by the others, who assured hi
a proceeding would not be dignified. As it was, th
e five charged at the table in fairly good order, co
ing the mutual unsteadiness of floor and feet, an
bed at the backs of five seats before any one had bee
t. The captain of the ship, who sat at the head of th
, loudly applauded the performance and, smiling b
ly, gave a quintuple order to the steward. He was
ttle man, whose bald head tapered upwards, conicall
a rifle bullet, and the agent of his line had instructe
to be good to the Wandering Five.
e dinner passed as such dinners frequently pass aboa
. Save for the party at the captain's table, the weath
litions had practically obliterated the attendance, a
flow of hilarity indulged in by the Five was permitt
ontinue without check or hindrance. "My regards, Ca
" said Colonel Pace, tipping his glass, and temporari

forgetful of his distrust of the sea. "Here's at you, Cap," echoed the Commodore, and the attack began. The consumption of the meal was marked by a magnificent indifference to trifles. When Captain Clapham succeeded in emptying a bowl of scalding soup upon his knees, he smiled blandly on the company and assured them that he was a candidate for no man's concern, as his hide was tough and his trousers would wash. Lawyer Cloud, who had switched to Bass' ale, began to tremble violently after the fourth bottle and manifest a desire to say his prayers. At his orders, an attendant brought him a cushion, which he placed on the table before him, first dropping his plate to the floor to make room. Bidding the steward have him called precisely at seven, he laid his head on the cushion and slept placidly, rousing himself only at intervals to drowsily chant his share when the others struck up the chorus—

Heave-ho! Roll a man down.

Colonel Pace, whose appetite was as imperishable as all army appetites, was equally warm in his praise of the provender and of his own ability to consume it; and every time he clinked glasses with the Captain or the Commodore he murmured a few broken words of endearment over the bowed head of Cloud, by way of epitaph.

And through it all the wanton old tub was leaping and rolling and stampeding over the seas with a motion just as exhilarating as if she had been some trim white yacht with the right to consider herself coquettish. To Gaunt, who had lost the power to reason clearly some hours before, it was an inspiration merely to hear the water thumping and thrashing against her sides. In that sense of heaving and tossing on a windy sea—tempest and torrent without and lights and laughter and jolly good company within—there was a limitless charm and pleasure. And yet his brain was a chaos, through which an endless succession of fantastic ideas paraded and spun, without his being able to grasp the significance of any single one of them. The remarks and

antics of his friends excited him to uproarious laughter, in the midst of which he would be shocked by a sudden sense of desperation,—a vague apprehension of approaching calamity—for which he found it impossible to account. There flashed across him at intervals the idea that wise men forgot the sting of undesirable memories, in just such scenes, and there came, the very next instant, the conviction, none the less profound because mometary, that no influence was strong enough and no life long enough, to effect a stupefaction of a conscience. A mixture—what a mental mixture! And outside the seas danced. And over them the old ship pranced and curvetted and plunged. And inside the roysterers reveled, with laughter and song and gibe, bidding care go hang. And it was at the moment that Eustace Gaunt's mind had reached the summit of its crazy jumble that Captain Clapham, pointing a pudgy finger across the table, remarked, reproachfully, "I say, old chap, you're as glum as a cuttle-fish. Why don't you pull yourself together and say something?"

"Yes," acquiesced the lawyer, lifting his head from his cushion and rolling his red eyes, "you've been making so much noise I couldn't sleep."

Colonel Pace was making a great mumbling behind his napkin. His teeth had slipped their cogs over a walnut husk and it was necessary for him to readjust them. The task completed to his satisfaction, he leered dreadfully at Gaunt and roared, "Ya-as, young feller. Shine up your wits. Say, boys," turning to the others, "let's have a speech from the bridegroom."

"With all the pleasure in life," assented Gaunt, in response to the howl of approval that greeted the suggestion. He had never had any great fondness for Colonel Pace—the man duplicated his negatives and wore shirts that fastened in the back—but he requited his leer with an indulgent smile as he rose to his feet. "Dear fellow-swine and sots," he went on, beaming amiably upon the others, "I have always observed that when men—gentle creatures that they are—

have gorged themselves to satiety, their first thought is one that pertains to the eternal subject of sex. That, I suppose, is why I am facetiously hailed as 'bridegroom'; it would also account for my friend the Colonel's delicately expressive leer. It doesn't seem worth while to mind, but I wonder if any of you realize how ridiculously drunk you are."

"No," roared Lawyer Cloud, now thoroughly awake, in his indignation, "why should we? We're not lightning calculators."

"I'm not," piped the Captain, tearfully, "I'm not, old chap. I declaiah, 'm not."

"Why, you sodden old saw-horse," rejoined the orator politely, his voice rising as his disrespect for his audience increased, "you are in a condition that defies words to paint it. You could not even sing three bars of your favorite song if you tried."

"I can, I can!" averred the naval hero, his tones soaring to a wail as he realized the bitterness of the taunt. "Lis'n at me:—Fr'm stabbuddy-labbuddy—'way we go!—'way we go!—stabbed-lubbud—stab-slab-blab-blur. O, Lawd!" The effort was a brave one, but it would not do. The shining bald head wabbled in its socket for a moment or two and then sank peacefully on Cloud's cushion. The Captain's troubles were over. He snored; and the lawyer deftly inserted the handle of a carving-knife between his teeth and permitted it to rest there, explaining, quite without reason or wit, that he wished him to look like a swordfish.

"Was there ever," asked Gaunt, pointing appealingly to the drooping bald head, "a more touching illustration of my theory that the soothing influence of strong drink is the greatest blessing of any age? Look at that venerable form, bowed only with the overwhelming desire to rest, the seraphic smile of infinite content chasing itself over that classic mug. Could anything be more beautiful? Presently the Captain will turn that weighty head; anon, he will grunt, and again, he will wake and crave more drink.

Magnificent old man! He has found the way to happiness that we are all of us so ardently pursuing. Do you, sir"—turning to Colonel Pace—"ever hope to rival the Captain, or the Commodore either, as a gallant destroyer of bowls? It is useless. You never can. Your brain could not stand it. No brain could. No brain wants to. You all of you observe, I hope, that I have nobly done my duty by you this day. In order that you might all enjoy the felicity of drunkenness without seeing before you the haunting example and reproach of one sober man, I have violated custom and inclination and have—drank indefinitely. Could martyrdom go further?"

"That's great, old chap," shouted Cloud, "give us some more." The Commodore was beginning to look grave. And the glasses in the racks rattled with the heaving of the ship and the pounding of her screw.

"More of what?" demanded the orator, whose tones were becoming shriller and about whose mouth some strange gray lines were forming; "is there anything on all this wide earth that anyone wants more of? Isn't enough enough? How happy we all are, are we not? Isn't every thought and desire and aim of our lives gratified the minute we pitch ourselves into a trance like this and imagine we never had any? Ambition—bah! A shadow! Happiness!—pooh, a picturesque mockery that we're enjoying most when we don't know that we've got it! How lovely it is to be blind—not blind drunk, you tank!" (This to the Captain, who had aroused himself sufficiently to look up and grin affirmatively at the last proposition.) "I mean blind to good, blind to bad, blind to everything, just as we are. There are only two things in the world worth living for—Music and Beauty. Perhaps Beauty does not seem to be exactly coming my way, but I'm tolerably certain to get Music enough if you give me time. Say, you crazy old rabbits, does it not seem jolly to feel that we're all going to hell together?"

The Commodore, whose sobriety, strangely enough, was beginning to return as he observed that of his friend to have

departed utterly, looked more serious. He had noticed the fever in Gaunt's eyes and the alternating gentleness and ferocity of his tones. He also noticed his fingers twisting threads from the table-cloth. "What are you raving about, you young lunatic?" he asked, pleasantly, "there's lots of things worth living for if you'd only believe it. What about the sea?"

"Ah, yes, the sea!" acquiesced the "young lunatic," readily, "I forgot it and I beg its pardon. It is an attraction that never wears out. Its restlessness is a perpetual inspiration. Hear it smash against our sides now, just as if it wanted to take a hand in my preaching. Bravo, sea! Hi! hi! hi! hi! hi! hi! hi!—wow!" The war-whoop was one of triumph in a struggle to keep his feet after a mighty roll to starboard—a success he was only able to achieve by a steadying clutch upon Colonel Pace's shirt-bosom. "The sea—the glorious sea. Good-by, boys; I'm going up to look at it."

He chose his time and made a reasonably accurate plunge for the stairway at a moment when the steamer was on an even keel. He did not observe that the Commodore left his place and followed him. The three others continued their pursuit of happiness.

On deck, a disc of watery white—wretched apology for a moon—peered weakly through the racing clouds. The sea was a heaving wilderness of gray, dotted with mountains and laced with surge. With every plunge, the ship ducked her blunt nose down deep and the wind whipped the spray into waterfalls.

Gaunt, who evidently imagined himself still in the presence of his friends, continued his eulogy of, or apostrophe to the sea with unabated fervor, steadying himself by a firm clutch on the rail. "You are admirable, sea," he howled in the teeth of the wind, "because you rage and roar honestly, when your temper tells you to—there is no sneaking, hiding and covering up of your sentiments. You are beautiful in your hours of peace, and in your fury you are matchless

and superb. I love and adore that fury because it makes the mere passions of men appear so utterly puny and despicable. What is the sting of a regret beside your roar—the incident of a wasted life in the presence of your stupendous thunder? When I see you rage and hear you rave, I dream of the music of a million centuries, all pressed into one mighty chord and crashed into my ears at once. Sea—sea—you awe and you stun, but you also woo and entice! To others you may seem to be howling dirges; to me you are sighing a threnody of exquisite compassion and love. Yes—yes—the ship is ploughing on, I know—on to damnation for aught I care!—but your mighty waves are singing—singing—and yonder, far behind, in the stormy path we have traversed, a sweet face smiles through the waste and a pair of white arms beckon me back! Life!—death!—what are they? Jokes, both. * * * * * I do not know why, but I feel that I must get nearer to the sea. * * * * Ah, curse you!"

"Stop thinking, old man; stop thinking!"—it was the Commodore that was speaking—"hold your teeth together and shut your eyes. It will pass away in a minute. I had the same thing once myself, in India. Easy now. We'll be all right presently."

It was a scene both ridiculous and undignified. The Commodore was lying flat upon his friend's chest, holding his wrists in a grip of steel and pinning him to the sodden deck. He had grappled him at the moment he had leaped upon the rail, and the two had waged there for a minute, clinging to the shrouds, as pretty a rough-and-tumble struggle as one may see outside a wrestling-mat. The old Commodore's iron frame had stood the test well. For a moment, there, hanging to the ropes with one hand and mastering his errant maniac with the other, and with the combings from the seas smashing over them both, he had imagined that it was all up with them. But seasoned muscles told, for once, upon youth and indulgence, and the return to the deck had been safe and certain, if sudden and ungraceful.

A smile blending sympathy and amusement played ove the old Commodore's grim features as he felt his captive form swell and expand in the futile effort to effect his re lease. As he applied the saving pressure, he kept utterin words of counsel and comfort.

"You young idiot," he panted, "there's nothing to bothe about now—not a thing. You're not going to heave your self overboard—not for a minute. Pull yourself togethe now—pull hard! It's nothing but nerves, remember—noth ing else in the world. Quiet now, and I'll let you up." I those few seconds there was passing through the brai of the man beneath a very climax of humiliation and o causeless, unreasoning rage. His mind was a mirror int which every detail of his behavior was flashed, bringing wit its reflection a new sense of desolation and wrong. His eye seemed burning into the back of his head like two points o molten metal and the world spun round vaguely, to a medle of ridiculous, catchpenny tunes. He was assailed by strange despair, the sense of which was heightened and en hanced by the physical helplessness brought by the struggl and its outcome. Ordinarily of fair strength, he was no as weak as an infant. In that state of nervous and bodil collapse it seemed as if every shameful happening since th world began had suddenly piled its weight upon him. Th most exasperating thought of all sprang from the knowl edge that he lacked sufficient strength to thrust his con queror off his chest; but writhe as he would, that was im possible.

The Commodore kept his position and his grip until hi comrade lay exhausted and quite still beneath him. Ther in the dim light cast by the flickering moon, he looked int his face and its expression satisfied him. Rising, he re marked: "You may get up, old chap. You'll not hav any accidents—now," and lumbered away down the deck.

Though conscious of every detail of all that had passed Gaunt could not account for it and did not try to. He fel

strangely weak and indifferent. He gained his stateroom without encountering the others.

In the night he awoke and endured there, in that stuffy cabin, while the sea beat and rioted without, an hour of the inferno with which Fate justly requites license—too long protracted. At the moment he announced to himself, aloud, in the darkness, his intention to take another look at the sea, a lank and wondrously shirted figure came clambering down from the upper berth. "Take this, my boy," said a voice, soft almost to womanishness. "This" was a sedative, prepared in advance, with much forethought and cunning, and it produced the needful effect.

"Ellis," murmured the pampered one, sleepily, "you won't give me away to the other old soaks, will you?"

The Commodore slipped a hard hand into his friend's and wrung it. "I'm going to stick to you, my boy," he declared violently, "to the finish. I only exact one thing in return. Don't let the other fellows catch you at this sort of thing. You mustn't give 'em too much amusement, you know."

"I won't," promised Gaunt. "And I say, Ellis," he added, "it's really not a habit with me—this going to pieces. I hope you understand that."

The Commodore grasped his hand again and shook it. "Old man," he said, slowly and with great impressiveness, "*I understand everything*, and whatever comes, I am your friend." And the old yatchsman blinked his eyes in the dark very rapidly.

CHAPTER XXVI

CEMENTED

Beautiful Charleston, with its sleepy people, its enervating sunshine, its rose-twined trellises and its wonderful little black children rolling in the mire! There was a stop there for some hours, which served to give these five salt-water heroes their land-legs once more and to afford opportunity for the sending of some telegrams. Down on the esplanade the Commodore gave a marvelous lecture on the many varieties of fish to be found in these waters—varieties which, he solemnly assured his hearers, ran all the way from sharks to red herring. The sun made a lotus-spot of that bit of green park this January morning—so different from the ice and the clouds and the murk of the frozen North—and the Five loafed along lazily with their eyes half shut, drinking in the delights of the scene and the atmosphere, though dear Heaven knows it was long since any of them had found joy in so mild a tipple. The colored folk bowed and smirked and were rewarded with small coins; shy little brown wenches brought them bouquets and odd little trumpery knick-knacks, carved of wood; and a tall and graceful girl, standing on a rose-clad piazza in a white dress, like some sculptured dream of the summer, turned her gold head so swiftly that the sun made rainbows upon it, and smiled demurely at them as they passed. Then good-by to the sleepy people and the queer twisted streets, with houses still showing the cracks and rifts of that awful earthquake so well remembered; and so on to another day and night of sailing; sailing, this time, over a sea like a mirror, with the sun by day and the moon by night to set jewels in it and the gentlest of breezes to sigh it to sleep. There was music, too, upon the waters that

ght; for a sturdy old Irishman, equipped with unlimited oney and a bride one-third of his years, sat for many hours the stern-rail and chanted the ballads of his native land the mournful nasal minor that to the Celtic mind is indis- ensable to their artistic interpretation. Once the Five, in esperation, broke, by careful arrangement and precon- erted signal, into a chorus in which each sang a different r in a different key, but the ancient minstrel of Erin, far om being either offended or embarrassed, accepted the terruption as homage to his genius, and rewarded its uthors with a magnificent bow of thanks, in which his ride disengaged herself from his embrace and ceased her ccupation of steadily eating bananas long enough to join. cidents of a voyage that ended quite without catastrophe d with all of the devoted Five in reasonably good health d spirits. Then Jacksonville, noisier than Charleston d, being thronged with northern tourists, decidedly less eal; and after that a railroad journey through tangled for- ts and lily-carpeted marsh, where lace-like silver moss ng in the trees and the buzzards sailed overhead—a land warm, soft sunshine, of gorgeous foliage and much ma- ria. And after that—

Miss Plum, looking very cool and hospitable, stood on e platform of the little station in the baking sun. She ve both hands to her fiancé and a smile to his four friends, ho ranged themselves in a row behind him, like school- ys waiting to be chidden. At her direction the four ndled themselves with their traps into a single car which, tached to a miniature engine, stood waiting to make the urney from the junction into the little town. She her- lf, she said, would drive Mr. Gaunt home through the oods.

Five or six shambling natives, with yellow jowls and nken chests, watched the two as they entered the lady's ght buggy and dashed off down the sandy road.

"You mustn't mind Flames," said Miss Plum coolly, as er horse shied violently at a fleck of sunlight that lay in

his path; "he's always doing that, but he doesn't mean anything by it. I don't think he's quite right in his head, you know."

"Poor thing," sympathized her cavalier. "I think you are very courageous to drive such an animal."

"Flames and I understand each other now," asserted Flames' mistress, biting her lip in the effort of tugging at the reins; "we didn't always, though. He ran away with me once and tried to take a five-barred gate in his stride. He hurt himself more than he did me, though. Since then we have been better friends."

The sandy roadway lay direct between the giant pine trees, and every time that dear Flames shied, which was on an average once in two minutes, a wheel of the vehicle missed a tree-trunk by a hairsbreadth. "I am agreeably surprised," confessed the lady, after a long and critical look, "to see you making such a good appearance. I didn't think there would be much left of you after your trip with those veterans."

"There isn't," declared Gaunt; "I am really a wreck. It is only my great happiness, you know, that enables me to look like a live person."

"I heard one of the girls say something about its being a tank steamer," was the quiet reply, "and I imagine she was right. The others seemed to stand it fairly well, too—all except the Captain. He was the only one of you that looked repentant. What did you do to him?"

"Without the Captain's example," protested Gaunt solemnly, "there is no telling what would have happened to any of us. His perpetual sobriety was the one leavening feature of the trip."

The horse gave a plunge that tested the traces, and the devoted lovers rocked to and fro in the buggy in the effort of remaining seated. "Flames is not used to such shocks," said Miss Plum; "not even when they are delivered on the score of friendship. If we are upset I shall blame the Captain for it."

"The Captain," vowed Gaunt, "would be wretched for life if he thought he had given a fellow-creature an unhappy moment. I never knew a more sunny-tempered man."

"I should call him tropical, in his tastes," declared the Major's daughter, "and his friend Cortlandt Ellis, too. They make a splendid pair. They will find their work cut out for them here, however. Papa has attended to the supplies and he declares there shall be no shirking, whatever he means by that. Do you think you can stand it?"

"I can stand anything," boasted Gaunt.

Miss Plum looked at him with approval. "Is it not jolly," she asked, pulling Flames to the center of the road after a weird acrobatic plunge that brought them to the very verge of a disaster; "that we are a pair of such very sensible people—not a bit sentimental, I mean?"

"Very," assented her companion, and added gravely, "we are old enough to know better."

With all his gymnastics, Flames was making good time. He had dashed out of the sand and pines with a final dive and half-somersault and was now spinning along a hard shell road that gleamed hotly in the sunshine. In the distance could be seen a tall white flag-pole, with the stars and stripes flying from it bravely. Beyond was a large red structure—the Major's southern castle. "We are nearly home," announced the young lady. "That"—she gave a circular sweep of her whip, covering the entire perspective of pines, orange groves and scrub—"is my farm. Don't you think it's pretty?"

Gaunt was watching a buzzard, that circled and sailed overhead like some menacing spectre of wrath. "It is like a stage picture," he answered, with ready diplomacy, and asked presently, "Who are all these men?"

There were fifty of them, black and white, villainous of countenance and only half-clad, toiling away with picks and shovels in the unguarded flare of the sun. "They are convicts," explained Miss Plum, clucking to Flames; "the county makes them build the road. They are a godsend to

papa. He has no earthly right to interfere with them, but he comes out every once in a while and berates them for their laziness and then goes back to the house and sends them milk and tobacco. There's papa now."

The portly figure of the lord of the manor, clad all in white, could be descried on the piazza. He carried a stout oak staff with which he was gesticulating energetically. Flames, after a final furious plunge at a flock of ducks that waddled across the road in front of the gate, went up the drive at a smart pace, between two lines of gorgeous rose-bushes, and stopped with a jolt. The Major, handsome and vigorous as ever, and perspiring freely, was too much overcome to so much as ejactulate "Waugh." He bounded from the piazza like a great rubber ball, flew to the side of the buggy and pulled his children forth like two sacks of meal. The embracing that followed was indiscriminate. The Captain and the Commodore and Pace and Cloud, who just then drove up in a mule-wagon, bellowed a greeting in chorus, and then, and then only, did the Major find voice. "Wow, boys," he exploded, "I'm glad you're here; waugh!" And he capered over the grass as nimbly as any schoolboy, tears rolling down his face, declaring himself to be the happiest of men. The Florida atmosphere was not a circumstance in dampness to the touching spectacle.

The wedding, which took place two days later, would have greatly excited the town if it were possible to excite a Florida town about anything. The natives of that part of Florida outgrow their emotions at an early age. They acquire coma simultaneously with the ague and, once so equipped, live and die without the expense of futile effort to escape from either. A wedding ceremonial wearing metropolitan hall-marks, such as satin trappings for bride and bridemaids and a church full of roses from Thorley, might cause some lifting of sallow brows and some peevish nasal comments on the crime of extravagance, but it could not for a moment shake the native in his steady contemplation of the problem of how to relieve his northern brother of

reatest possible amount of cash in the shortest possible : of time, nor yet give him the most trifling sensation of ıishment. In all inland Florida towns all northern res- s or visitors are believed to be crazy—a belief that is, ıe first place, justified, by their presence there—and ı their actions serve to heighten that belief they excite er remark nor protest from the native. He simply gs his shoulders and goes on eating quinine. So the ling itself, while possessing unusual features, failed to se any demonstration of wonder in the community, gh they say the battle-royal among the negro popula- for the floral decorations, after the bridal cortége had he church, is talked of to this day.

ıch has been said in these pages on the subject of s, and it would be idle to essay description of one that hadowed all the others as the triumphs of a Caesar hadow a Bowery sparring-bout. How may it all be —that heroic demolition of a bulging castle-full of —the majestic murder of a menu that had taken its nt soldier-author months of arduous brain-labor to ›ile? How the sun shone and smiled without and the , and magnolias bloomed and the mocking-birds on ıigh hedge trilled a paean for the punishment of that ıs flood and that matchless massacre of meat? Hey, modore, and hey, Captain, you are "in for the wind- as they say in honest prize-ring battles, and you are : to the finish, as brave men should be! You, Captain, found your fate and your best love in a platter of ry pig that your host, the Major, has carved for you his own lavish hands, and your nose and your eye- 's and your dignified old bald thinking-box—aye, even Piccadilly accent itself!—all are submerged in the · of champagne that has given you so fair a drowning. , Commodore, have not flinched, either, though you found time to blink kindly and often upon the "happy " as Editor Flyburton would have called them, across im of your gold glass. And you, Cloud, and you, Pace,

O learned lawyer and warrior bold, you are doing your share right nobly; for all that keeps you from under the table is the knowledge that some of the good things still remain above it. You are floating, forsooth, in a sea of sack; and in it you may dive or drown, or sink or swim, as you please, for your appearance in this history, brief as it has been, is done, and the moral of your behavior will be needed no more—there are so many others to point without it. Even the scrawny little parson, poor chap, who never since the beginning of his connection with the parish has been presented with an opportunity to over-feed, catches the contagion and packs himself with fowl and pig until his good-natured little sunken ferrety eyes are pushed outwards to within a reasonable distance of his cheek-line. And goodliest sight of all, maybe, it is, when the niggers on the plantation, of all sizes and ages and grades of goodness and badness and blackness, file solemnly past the open door for a fleeting glimpse of the long hall and an absorption of the example being afforded them by their betters. No, not quite the goodliest, either, for that must be when the Major, whose bliss has reached its acme and apogee, grabs a miscellaneous assortment of fluttering girlhood—the Dearthing, the Pallon, anybody, everybody!—and kissing 'em all round—smack!—roars forth an exordium on all mankind to which nobody pays the least attention. Even the dogs bark at this glad sight and Captain Clapham laughs and cheers so loudly that he brings on a coughing spell and shoots several of the Major's family portraits with half-swallowed pellets of capon and pig. After that, the era of final health-drinkings and of refined jests among the men and of quaintly maudlin farewells—the bewildering succession of anti-climaxes without which no modern wedding-day is complete. And through it all the mocking-birds whistle and the magnolias and roses bloom as sweetly as ever. Odd.

As the light open carriage left the white shell road and whirled into the sandy track through the woods, Agnes

Plum Gaunt shook the rice from her skirts and fervently ejaculated, "Thank God!"

"Agreed," said Gaunt.

Neither interrogated the other as to the source of the sentiment.

CHAPTER XXVII

A SUNSET ON THE SEA

The charm of a sunset, usually, is dependent upon the mood of its witnesses, but there are sunsets seen at times in the tropics that create in the beholder a vague wonder as to how the earth can be supposed to contain any beauty, when the sky can flaunt so much. Such a sunset, mayhap, can be seen in but one corner of the world—coming out of Havana Harbor at the close of an afternoon when the heat has flared like a furnace and Time seemed in league with Satan, to keep the grateful dusk away.

Such a sunset, once viewed, is not soon forgotten.

To begin with, it stole upon the face of the sea softly, like a blush, tinting the smooth expanse with alternating splashes of delicate crimson and pink. These hues presently faded and paled, merging imperceptibly into the deepening blue, until the sky itself seemed to bend and catch them back again, spreading and blending them into its own tremendous arch of expanding purple and gold. The merest tremor of a breeze sighed across the water and the ship glided on like a discreet black spectre, the solitary moving thing in the presence of that marvel of the painted west.

The chords of color began in two slim red bolts, pointed like daggers and oh, so many weary, weary miles apart. From these the pyramids of flushes and tints rose gradually, piling themselves upon the clouds in heaps and arrogantly contrasting their riches with the pauper gray sky beyond.

Red of every varying shade; purple and brown and amethyst; vagrant morsels of drifting fleece, edged with tassels of yellow; and away to the south and the north a myriad little scattering flecks and tendrils of gold, shining like cowslip balls in a daisy-dotted meadow and shifting and coquetting forever with the space. Down from the heights stalked a central motive of imperial scarlet, flaming like a beacon; and before the majesty of its coming, all its little tender pink and purple children retired a-tremble, changing their attitudes with every flash from the great sun-center and perishing submissively when outshone beyond endurance. A surging and crashing of color that produced harmony by its very magnificence; for the banquet of the eye insensibly spread its seductions to the ear and, in the passing of the splendid panorama, the fancy caught the suggestion of symphonies and anthems. The blending of the tones in the picture spoke to the soul tenderly, like the swell of an organ, and displayed to the light of Understanding the charm of one's dearest hopes and dreams.

And the ending of this one sunset was the most exquisite thing in its beautiful, brief life. When the slim red bolts at its two extremes had slowly vanished and the purple and brown and amethyst hillocks had leaned gently toward each other, deprecating the good-night caress of the advancing gray; when a faintness had stolen upon the tassels of drifting fleece, and the little round cowslip-balls had rolled themselves down into the sea—then flared majestically forth the one vast climax, the farewell burst of unutterable splendor with which the angels, as one might fancy, sought to convince mankind of the superior charms of their abode as compared with ours. For that mighty center-piece of scarlet, still shining hotly in the midst of its expiring flame, was suddenly reft and split, as though struck by some huge cannon-shot, and from the great hole torn in its heart there streamed a glory of purest gold. It seemed as if the doors of a vast cave in the heavens had suddenly been flung apart. At its edge were rocks and tinkling rivulets and above and

around the lesser treasures of the forest, lined and shot with gold—the nodding leaves, the flakes of moss, the delicate tracery of creeping vines. And beyond, within the cave itself, the flimsy outline of a thousand golden wonders—shadowy towers and pinnacles; palaces with trellised windows; mysterious mosques, with painted altars and lofty minarets; flowery gardens and sleepy rivers and a smooth lake fretted by lisping fountains and traversed by fragile boats. And round the doors of this cave the shattered sea of scarlet had wound itself like a sash, drawing the extremities together and slowly, slowly and inexorably lessening the outlines of that golden vision whose beauty no human eye might look upon unmoved. And as the portals were drawn closer and closer, revealing, finally, the faintest suggestion of the yellow dazzlement within, the voice of a little fair-haired child broke the stillness: "Mother," it said, with conviction and reverence, "I believe that's the house where God lives."

Save for the child and its parent, the man lolling in the steamer chair was the only passenger on that side of the deck. To him there came just then a shambling negro steward with a request, couched civilly enough, for sixty cents.

"What for?" sleepily asked the man in the chair, as he produced the money.

The servitor jerked an ebony thumb over his shoulder at an aft suite. "Beer for the lady, sir," he said, with the hauteur of his race.

And the dreaming of the Dreamer was done.

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE FORCE OF "NIGGER" PHILOSOPHY

"O, yo must be a lubber ob de Lawd,
Or yo won't go to hebben when yo die!"

In the silence and solitude of a sloughy pine forest sudden sounds are generally welcome. This song was not. It was bawled forth by a white-haired old negro who was toiling along the sandy path. There were two reasons why it was obnoxious. Save for the croaking of frogs it was the only sound that had broken the deadly stillness of slough and woods for two hours, and its abruptness and violence were not soothing to a set of jangling nerves. Also, it came just in time to frighten away a fine flock of doves, for which Mr. Eustace Gaunt had been waiting patiently, sitting on a tree-stump, gun in hand. The doves of Florida are larger than snipe and just as "game." Shooting them offers, in that part of the state, the one avenue of escape from utter and absolute boredom. Moreover, when shot at for some days in succession they become extremely shy. In this case, the sportsman had been waiting for something like half a day for the shot of which the singing of this wretched black man had deprived him. Small wonder, then, that he rose to his feet as he approached and cursed him with great bitterness and volubility.

The negro stopped abruptly. He was a quaint old fellow, with both black knees poking through his trousers. "Heah, heah, you white man!" he cried warningly; "doan you swayah at me—doan you swayah at me! Doan you do hit, sah!"

"Why, you horrible old black wretch," observed the angry sportsman amiably, "what do you mean? Why shouldn't I swear at you? You've frightened my birds away

with your crazy bawling. I've half a notion to give you a charge of birdshot in the legs."

The old fellow's mouth swung open like a toll-gate and he laughed till the woods echoed. "In mah laigs," he chuckled, "in mah laigs! Now, wouldn' dat be funny—a fine young spawtin' gemman like you shootin' dis heah old nigger in de laigs? Ow, Gawd!"

The laugh rang out again—loud, mellow, resonant. It evidenced an utter freedom from care—a soul at peace with itself and all the world beside. To the "fine young spawtin' gemman" this was irritating. "What on earth can you see that's funny you old rascal," he demanded, "in the possibility of getting shot in the legs? I should think you'd be afraid."

"White man," was the reply, delivered calmly, but without a shade of impertinence, "Ah ain't afraid of nawthin'. You kain't scayah me."

"Ah," sighed the young man with languid interest, "you ain't afraid of nawthin', ain't you? Why?"

"Bekase," answered the old blackamoor, throwing back his head and pushing his fingers through his thick white hair, "bekase Gawd's with me."

The ready cant, of course, of colored Methodist camps. The words themselves meant nothing. It was the man's manner that was convincing. The manner of one thoroughly satisfied with the world but ready to leave it at any time. The declaration was flat and unequivocal; the glance that accompanied it clear, serene, self-confident.

The white man's irritation gave place to curiosity. "You have faith in God's condescension, then?" he inquired with some sarcasm.

"Yaws, yo' honah," came the reply, promptly and cheerfully; "Ah doan know what yo means by dat lawst big wuhd, but Ah says yaws bekase Ah know what Faith means, an' de Lawd knows Ah has lots er that. Why, de Lawd's lookin' down at us two now, right troo dat lubly white swamp-mist dat you see risin' yondeh. It was dat—haw!

haw! haw!—dat kep you from shootin' me in mah laigs." The great laugh rolled through the woods again.

"The Lord seems to have leisure to spare," remarked Gaunt cynically.

"Why, you pore white man!"—the pity in the exclamation was infinite—"you done scoff at de good Lawd! You-all's in a bad way."

"Silly old man! So you're sorry for me, are you?"

"Yaws, mistah,"—this very solemnly—"Ah is."

It was an odd picture—the young man with his smart shooting clothes, his lounging attitude and his weary eyes; the old negro, bent with age and in rags, his black face full of concern for the person whom every social law would have declared his bodily, mental and spiritual superior. Gaunt found the sympathy of the ebony face exasperating. "Oh, go along, you old fool," he ordered.

"Yaws, sah," answered the old chap submissively. He began trudging away through the sand. The darkening skies and the white swamp-mist looked desolate. "Stop!" commanded Gaunt.

"Yaws, sah!" The old man obeyed. He stood still, humbly, without looking round. A silver dollar fell in the sand at his feet. He picked it up, fingered it over carefully, and with perhaps some longing in his solemn old eyes. But he toiled bravely to where the white man sat, on the fallen tree-stump, with his gun across his knees, and held the coin out to him. "I doan want youah dollar, mistah," he said.

"Why?" asked Gaunt, softly.

"'Xcuse me, sah. Ah'd ruther not say."

"I won't take it back unless you do say."

"Well, sah, Ah won't take hit bekase Ah won't take no money from a blawsphemer."

"When did I blaspheme?"

"At me, when Ah come troo dese woods just now a-praisin' Gawd."

"Give the dollar to your church, then, and beg me off."

" 'Xcuse me, sah. Pra'rs ain't no good, made dat-a-way. You kain't buy *my* Gawd for no iron dollah."

The tone was not impertinent. It was rather one of pride. The giver of the coin was not offended. He was both amused and impressed. It was the first time in his life he had found himself unable to give away money. "Don't mind about the church, then," he said, meekly; "keep the dollar for yourself."

The old man eyed the coin in his black palm wistfully. He was thinking of certain little hungry bellies that it would stuff with sweet potatoes for a week if he yielded. He was human. "S-s-s-say 'bless de Lawd,' mistah," he stammered, "an' Ah'll take hit."

Gaunt threw back his head and roared. Recovering himself he took off his hat obediently and said, with a fair counterfeit of reverence, "Bless the Lord." As the old man pocketed the dollar, he added, idly, "I'll give you another if you tell me why you're sorry for me."

"That's easy," declared the old fellow, quite without embarrassment; "Ah'se sorry for you bekase youah *a atom.*"

"An atom, am I?"

"Yaws. All you white folks widout de lub ob man or de feah ob Gawd in youah hearts is atoms. Where's you-all come from, hay? Where you-all be goin', hay? Look at you, a-ploughin' troo de worl' stuffin' yo' bellies wiv red meat, and a-burnin' youah mouves wiv hot wuhds. White man, who tole you to do all dat, hay?" (When a Forida darky wishes to be profoundly impressive he addresses you as "white man.") "Look at youah big Majah, up dah to de great house yondeh! He's not lorst yit, de Majah, faw Ah see him gib milk an' chicken to dem convick niggers on de road—an' dey willin' an' agreeable to cut his t'roat any time faw a chaw uv terbacca ef he only knew it—but law me, man, ain't youah big Majah a terror? He likes good whisky, he do, an' small blame to him for that air. We all likes dat, we do, an' a good drink makes us lub de Lawd

an' de ole woman all de mo'. But de Majah, he air bad, he am. He goes a-stompin' an' a-roarin' roun' like a mad bull o' Bashan an' he doan' cayah who he cuss, he doan'. An' when he done go fishin' he just drinks de ole whisk' an' calls on de Lawd Jesus Christ all de time, 'kase he kain't get no bites. I done tole him one day dat when he quit callin' on de Lawd Jesus dat away he might catch a few fish, but not befo'."

His listener grinned appreciatively and inquired: "And what did the Major say to that?"

"Say?" repeated the old fellow reflectively; "he didn' say much. He just gummy a great kick on mah rump wiv he boot an' ordaw me to go on. 'Take dat, you old fool, then,' he says, 'an' cuss foh me.' Ah submit Ah deserved de kick for sassin' de quality. But de Majah he gummy a dollah, too."

"Did you make him say 'bless the Lord' before you took it?"

"Now doan' you go pokin' game at me, you pore white creetur. De Majah kain't help hisself if *his* Gawd's in his belly an' his hot ole mouf. An' de day he kicked me on mah rump Ah prayed foh him. An' it warn't no love-pat of a kick, neethur."

"And you're sorry for me, you say?"

"Yaws. Ah is."

"Because I am an atom?"

"Yaws."

"Why am I—an atom?"

"Law, white man, bekase you don't amount to nawthin'. You-all is full of vainglory an' de pride an' lust ob de very debbil; an' all you can do for de love an' glory of Gawd is to put on dem fine clothes an' come down heah and blow de guzzards outen pore buhds. Ain't dat enough why?"

"Anything more?"

"Why, yaws, white man. Look at yo' face. Dat face tells me yo' hain't got no use for dis worl' nor nobody in it. 'Tain't no good face. If yo' warn't such a fine young spawt-

in' gemman Ah'd say you done some mighty mean things in yo' life. 'Xcuse me, mistah. Yo' axed me."

"You wouldn't change places with me, then?"

The great laugh echoed again. "No, mistah."

"Then tell me why you are so happy yourself."

"White man, Ah's happy bekase Gawd lets me go on libbin'. Ah's happy bekase de sky is wide an' de breff of de wind is soft on mah cheek an' on mah knees where dey comes troo de holes in mah pants. Ah's happy bekase de ole woman's makin' a pow'ful fine stew ovah in de cabin yondeh, and dere's six little black debbils to eat it wiv us. Ah's happy bekase dere mah datter's chillun—mah dead datter, sah, wiv de libin' black beast of a husban' over dare in de chain gang, damn him!—'Xcuse me, sah!—he done kill huh wiv his extronary conduc'—an' ah's happy bekase de Lawd lets me feed dere mouves. Thank you kindly for the dollah, sah."

"Here's the other. Bless the Lord."

"Well, white man, you-all ain't lorst. Ah take dat back. But you hadn't oughter say you'd shoot me in mah laigs. Good-night, white man."

"One minute. Are you always as happy as this, old man?"

"Ah's happy whenebber Gawd's lettin' me do somethin' for somebody else. You kain't be happy no other way."

Pitied by a white-haired negro, shambling in rags through a Florida pine wood! To a man of education, and some fastidiousness of habit, the thought was instructive, to say the least. Gaunt rose from his tree-stump and slowly mounted the hill. The malaria of the region was well into his system by this time, although he did not know it, and he moved lazily. Over the tops of the pine trees the sky was merging from gray into black, and somewhere near by a mocking-bird was whistling a mournful good-night. He could not recover, immediately, from the effect of the conversation with the old darky. The latter's religious fervor was grotesque enough; his compassion was exquisite. The

lowest type of the race commiserating his betters in so frank and sincere a fashion!—how tremendously amusing! Did his own face, then, show his feelings and his character so plainly? What was there, in three months of life in this lotus-land to produce sentiments of palpable discontent? Over the hill, where the lights from the Major's house were already twinkling, there was the same lively company, the same inevitable feast, and the same inevitable and intellectual pastimes of pool and poker afterwards. The Major's appetite and Miss Dearthing's smiles—the rest of the array of fluttering femininity having been sent home long ago—would both be limitless and infinite. Next day there would be more sunshine, more flowers, more laziness, more malaria. The niggers would toil and sweat in the road, and the voice of the Major, alternately "cussing" them or inviting them to partake of his milk and tobacco, would ring on the hot air like a clarion. Weary eyes would close of their own accord in the sun and the buzzards overhead go on sailing, sailing, sailing. And amid the indolence and the dreaming, Memory would be wielding its scalpel and Conscience hammering like a flail. An alluring prospect.

Half a mile away the smoke from the old nigger's shanty ascended in a slim gray coil. He was very near it now, and there was an added lustiness in his bellow,

> "O, yo must be a lubber of de Lawd,
> Or yo won't go to hebben when you die!"—

As the young man slipped the cartridges from his gun, prior to entering the house, his sensations were peculiar. It seemed odd that he should have reached his present time of life without learning the truth about himself—until told it by a foolish old nigger in a Florida pine wood. Then, too, those last words had left a ridiculously strong impression—

"Ah's happy whenebber Gawd's lettin' me do somethin' for somebody else. You kain't be happy no other way."

CHAPTER XXIX

A MORNING OF PERSONAL JOURNALISM

McLaren had resigned immediately upon the entrance of his subordinate into the chief's family, and had gone to writing plays. He had been succeeded, as editor of *The Fang*, by the literary reviewer, whose sunny personality, like that of his predecessor, was oddly at variance with the biting satirical paragraphs that he forthwith proceeded to write. Large and plump, with a heart as full of fun as his head was of brains, he looked more the joker than the critic. Like McLaren, he refused, persistently and by habit, to take the Major seriously and was respected by the latter in consequence.

The dear old Commodore, sitting by the window blinking his eyes in the sun like a cat, was in one of his talkative moods. "I believe," said he, "this getting a son-in-law has made the Major twenty years younger."

"Indeed it has," acquiesced the new editor, readily, "and unlimited years happier. And Heaven knows he didn't need that. I fancy, too, that most people have felt the effect of his good nature since his return."

"That's true, too," declared the Commodore. "He's raised salaries all around in the business office and I just heard him swear at one of his stenographers for crying because her teeth ached and then order her to go to his own dentist and get them fixed. He's been doing that sort of thing ever since he came back from Florida."

"Wonderful Major!" breathed the editor softly. "Terrorizing society in his newspaper and using the proceeds to mend a weeping stenographer's teeth! Was ever such philanthropy?"

"Right you are! Florida has done wonders for the Major this trip."

"No malaria in his, then?"

"Not much. You can't touch us old fellows. We're too tough. I fancy, though, that the young man hasn't been so lucky."

"Is that what's the matter with him—malaria?"

"Of course it is. I know the symptoms. Had 'em myself. Killing lassitude for six hours out of every twenty-four; fickle appetite, or none; a disordered digestion and a craving for forgetfulness that nothing but whiskey will satisfy. No man ought to go into the climate for the first time and stay three months. It's suicide."

"As bad as that?" queried the editor, lighting his cigarette. "Tell me," he added curiously, "what are the symptoms, as the victim recognizes them?"

"Thought I'd just explained. Well, in the first place, the system absorbs the poison slowly, as a sponge will lick up moisture—oh, you can't beat your Florida malaria as a torturer! It's as powerful as it is insidious—and the mischief is only recognized after it has been done. The mental effect is as marked as the physical one. With the enervation—the weakness in the knees and the back and elbows—comes a feeling of utter despondency and gloom. Malaria will turn the happiest man in the world into a misanthrope; but if he happen to be low-spirited by nature, or have any secret unhappiness on his mind to worry about, then woe betide him, for it will make the smallest trouble into a mountain and augment big ones in proportion. I have known men smitten with malaria to worry themselves to the verge of the grave over the merest trifles; the plight of one afflicted with an actual grievance may be imagined. Physically, the victim's condition is just as unenviable. He feels that he is in possession of all his faculties without the ability to exercise them. He is normally strong and vigorous one hour and weak as a cat the next. It's maddening."

"And the only cure, you say, is?—"

"Patience—and whiskey."

"I don't think," sighed the former literary reviewer, reflectively, "that Gaunt has much patience. Do you?"

The Commodore blinked solemnly. Whatever reply he might have contemplated was prevented by the entrance of the Major. The old warrior came floundering into the outer office with the grace of a whale, upsetting furniture in his haste and exploding "waugh-waughs" by way of greeting. His face was red and he was puffing out smoke like the funnel of a steamship. He threw open his desk, dropped his heavy stick to the floor with a clatter and bustled into the editorial sanctum. "Hoh!" he exclaimed fiercely, "what's going on here?"

The editor planted his feet comfortably on the desk before him, and gazed languidly out into the Square. "Nothing's going on, Major," he announced. "It's too nice a day to work."

The Major's manner lost some of its buoyancy. He knew the affectation of laziness was for but one purpose—to convince him of its author's indifference to his own opinion regarding it—and his aggressiveness diminished. As his eye fell on his son-in-law's empty chair, he bridled up again. "Where's the young man?" he exclaimed quickly.

The editor was by this time fingering an uncut French novel and oblivious to aught else. The Commodore, resting snugly in his arm-chair, took the query to himself and answered it, drawlingly: "Oh, I don't know, Major. He's in the Park somewhere, probably, picking strawberries." Just then Gaunt came in.

He exchanged salutations and dropped into his chair in a spiritless way, pitching a roll of closely written sheets of paper on his table. The Major bristled up, an affectionate and solicitous cyclone. "My bo-oo-o-oy!" he cried, slapping his victim heavily on the back, "how are you feeling? And don't you know it's deuced late to be getting down here?"

To a man with Florida malaria in every joint, a vigorous

slam on the back is not an agreeable salute. Then, too, the Major had bent his head, and there stole from his whiskers the faint but unmistakable odor of chops. Therefore the young man answered the old one with an undutiful impatience: "It doesn't matter much what time it is, Major, because I work while you're asleep"—pointing to the pile of manuscript—"and I'm feeling as well as usual, thank you."

"Waugh!" said the Major. "I hope," he added, picking up the papers, "that you've got some poems in this lot. You write devilish fine poetry sometimes, my boy—don't he, Ellis? Your poems seem to please people, and you haven't given us much of that sort of stuff lately."

"No," confessed Gaunt, "there are no poems in that lot. They're chiefly paragraphs. I haven't been in the mood for poems lately, but I'll go outside there presently, if you like, and dictate some to a stenographer."

"Well," the Major admitted, frankly and with sincerity, "I never could see why you poet-fellows couldn't do that. It seems to me it would save you lots of trouble."

"The surest way to get a poet to writing good poems, Major," announced the Commodore, still blinking, "is to call them 'stuff.' "

The editor laughed and the Major "waughed." Even Gaunt smiled feebly. Just then "Jimmy," the society paragrapher, entered, smartly dressed, plump, and affable as usual. He had his office manners with him. The Major's greeting was effusive, but respectful. "Glad to see you, sir," he declared; "got anything good up your sleeve?"

"Yes, indeed," was the ready reply; "Jack Bludsoe is posted at the Yacht Club for back dues and is off on a cruise somewhere, suffering from paresis, so they say. Old Van Trump is going to disinherit his daughter unless she gives up Teddy Scatterbrain, though how she's going to do it when she's secretly married to him already (or ought to be, if she isn't) nobody knows. The De Guysters are disputing because each thinks the other ought to take the Keeley cure,

when as a matter of fact it would do neither of them any harm. Tom Plunger has gone broke on Consolidated Gas and will be sold up, and the Drone divorce is regarded as a certainty. Not a bad week, eh?"

"I should say not," acquiesced the Major gleefully. "We ought to have a great paper, oughtn't we, Ned?"

"Greatest ever," grunted the editor, with his nose in his novel. He did not by any means like "Jimmy" or his scandals and made no secret of his feelings. "Ahem!—waugh!" coughed the old gentleman, turning again to his spruce contributor; "got your copy with you?"

"Jimmy's" manner underwent a change. "Ya-as," he drawled, with vast insolence. He assumed his monocle and stared through it at the Major, at the same time planting his feet firmly together and folding his hands behind him.

The Major understood. He coughed again, and retiring precipitately into the next room, went into executive session with his cashier, a young woman with fidelity-humped shoulders and a hunted look in her eyes. The executive session was brief. He returned from it with a slip of paper, which he handed to "Jimmy" with *empressement* and the urgent whisper, "Don't deposit it for a few days." Whereat "Jimmy" frowned slightly, but unbuttoned his coat and produced his manuscript.

The retirement of "Jimmy," an event that took place immediately after his receipt of his check and surrender of his "copy," was followed by an hour of comparative rest and quiet. The Major retired to dictate a letter to the musical critic asking that gentleman to reconsider his 251st resignation. The editor began writing a side-splitting travesty on his Parisian novel, his subordinate set to work languidly revising his paragraphs and the Commodore's pink nasal headlight pointed toward his chest in an attitude of repose. Outside the open window the spring air was as sweet as the breath of a Kent meadow and in the emerald foliage of the Square the sparrows were chirping madrigals.

A bitter miauling and spitting that presently burst upon

the atmosphere from the outer room excited no surprise. At the Major's island castle, his dogs appeared to hate one another in the proportion that they loved their master; in his New York office a similar study in emotional contrasts was presented by his cats. There were six of these cats, all very large, very fierce and very black, prowling through the office of this remarkable newspaper night and day. Some said they were the ghosts of consumptive contributors, but this could scarcely have been true, else they would have never shown the Major such vast affection. Three or four of them were generally lying on his desk, in attitudes of indolence, equally ready to snarl at one another or purr at his caress. The present outbreak was neither unusual nor alarming, but it served to set the Major a-snort and a-quiver. He dashed headlong into the mélée, emerging therefrom with a belligerent clutched in either hand by the nape of the neck and the others snarling at his heels. As usual on such occasions, the machinery of the establishment ceased to revolve. The business manager stopped filling out an advertising contract, the cashier studying her bank-book and the stenographer with the new teeth singing psalms on her good luck. All, however, viewed the situation with calmness save the Major, who almost wept as he rebuked his darlings or soothed them with "baby-talk." "Naughty pussies!" he crooned, as he slammed the offenders on his desk and fell to fondling them with much concern; "oo'll break oo papa's heart with your nasty fighting, so oo will." He bent over them devotedly. The business staff collectively bowed its head and smiled.

A crisp, metallic voice broke in with a chill recitative. "Major," it said, "what a lot of love you waste on those nasty cats." Miss Dearthing was speaking.

The Major answered, in accents of dignified reproach, "Tootles, how can you call my beauties nasty?"

Miss Dearthing smiled. This young woman was not disagreeable to look at; only the sixteenth of an inch of space that separated her two front teeth lent her smile a sugges-

tion of ravenousness. "Well," she remarked, amiably, "I think you might stop bothering with them, now that *I'm* here."

"Smack!"

The labial concussion echoed into the editorial rooms and caused the editors to twist nervously in their chairs. The black cats went to sleep and Miss Dearthing, who was dressed all in white, and looked spring-like, dabbed at her lips prettily with a lace handkerchief and walked over to the cashier's desk. The Major leaned back in his chair and stroked his beard. "Ah-waugh," sighed he.

The cashier, with a pained look, brought him over some checks to sign. "There's more of 'em coming in," she whispered.

It was fluttering girlhood's day. Miss Trenton and Miss Pallon, the former looking demure, the latter severe, sailed into the office and were duly smacked by the proprietor; a tribute regularly exacted and cheerfully paid. Miss Dearthing looked on beamingly. (No member of the array of fluttering girlhood exhibited jealousy when these rites were performed in the general presence.) The last report awakened the Commodore in the next room and drove the editor out to Delmonico's.

"Come, girls," piped the Major, with the skittishness of a two-year-old, "let's go in and see The Boy."

In they trooped, with much perking and chattering and much rustling of skirts. "The Boy," who was feeling very grown-up just then, bore the visitation with calmness and a full sense of the honor that it conferred. There may exist in the minds of liberal people an excuse for the entrance of women into the editorial rooms of a newspaper, but the average editor has not discovered it. The three flutterers ranged themselves about "The Boy's" chair, each showing more teeth than the other, and the Major standing off at a little distance, with his chest inflated and his right hand outstretched, like the orator in a menagerie. "Look," cried he, in tones of vast affection and pride, "how my Bo-oo-oy

works! Do you know he can just sit there at that desk and grind out paragraphs, or stories, or poems, or anything?"

"My!" cooed Miss Trenton.

"Dear me!" sighed Miss Pallon.

"Wonderful!" breathed Miss Dearthing. The cadence of a staccato triangular giggle fell upon the air and four sparrows hovering about the window-sill outside flew away in affright. Thereupon the three flutterers, wheeling upon the Major, took him in flank, as it were, and carried him by assault. "Major," they commanded in concert, "take us to lunch."

The Major looked pleased but coy. "Now girls!" he expostulated.

Three smacks and a "waugh." The brave old warrior was borne away bodily.

The Commodore was perspiring freely. For some reason he hated Miss Dearthing with exceeding devoutness and usually fled at her approach. "Good Lord," he ejaculated, as the bevy fluttered away, "how do you stand it?"

"I don't," said Gaunt, laughing and pitching down his pen; "that's why I do my work at night."

"A visitation of that sort," continued the Commodore, nodding his head at the door through which the venerable quarry had been pushed by his fair captors, "always drives me to drink."

"Let's make it a tandem, then. I feel a little weak myself."

"Go you."

As the two passed through the outer office, the Major looked up from his desk, where he was busily engaged in sorting his papers and cats, prior to departing with his fair guests, and roared forth bellicosely, "Ellis, where are you taking my Bo-oo-oy?"

"To the dairy, Major," replied the Commodore, placidly, "for some milk."

"I think," announced the old gentleman, with dignity, "that it's disgraceful to drink in business hours."

"That's why we do it," gently explained Gaunt.

In the hallway the two friends ran into Mrs. Marie St. Judas, just stepping out of the elevator. The little woman was looking exceptionally bright and young. "Why, Mr. Gaunt," was her sprightly greeting, "as I live, you are getting fat."

This time the man she addressed lost all patience. His reply was indelicate.

CHAPTER XXX

THE SERMON OF A TOPER

Cortlandt Ellis was a man who mystified some persons and delighted others. His mode of life was a source of regret to those that knew him best, but his vast knowledge, his gentleness and courtesy, together with his unfailing good temper, could at any time have secured him many more friends than he desired. To most of his acquaintances he was a man of close reserve, and difficult of approach ordinarily; but to all sufficiently fortunate to secure his liking, he was frank, cordial and sunny; and it was said of the Commodore's friendship that, once secured, it was never withdrawn without good reason. A statement not difficult of belief; for it was impossible to meet the steady gaze of the old yachtsman's mild blue eyes and not know him to be sincere.

The Commodore, like others of his stamp in New York, was a man with a history. His family was one that dated back to the early settlement of Manhattan Island, and even when at his shabbiest or when in his deepest cups, he could not wholly conceal the evidences of breeding and race. His early career was ancient history now, for the pace with men of his class in New York is swift, and no figure, however conspicuous, that drops by the wayside is long remembered. There were men of his own age and stamp, who knew him

well, veterans and thoroughbreds, like himself, who for the sake of past times and his unquenchable qualities of generous manhood, would have welcomed him to their houses and their clubs. Indeed, it was known full well that such men were in the habit of paying their old friend's dues year by year at the Yacht and other clubs in order that he might not lose his membership therein—a fairly strong test of modern friendship, that!—but to his old life among the beaux and bucks of his day the Commodore had bidden an adieu that seemed to be final. He would have none of their invitations, and the causes that had led to his retirement from his own world—a world for participation in which some people are willing to exchange their eternal peace—had become a matter of indifference rather than of guesswork.

It was a long while to remember now, but most people knew there had been a domestic difference—a wrangle of the sort that the aristocracy knows fairly well and vainly endeavors to prevent classes of less exalted degree from imitating. The details were only vaguely known, but at the parting of the ways Madame had gone abroad, taking, with her husband's full consent and approbation, the entire family fortune, as well as her children, with her. The Commodore, it is perhaps scarcely necessary to say, never spoke of these matters; and since that time his life had been moulded on irregular lines. His yachting friends would have styled it a drifting-match. He had roamed through every corner of the globe thus far contaminated by the step of man. He had shot white bears in the Arctics and elephants in Burmah. He had hobnobbed with African sheiks and chased Malay pirates in fleet feluccas across seas as blue as their death-giving steel. He had frozen in Alaska and sweated in fevers on the Amazon. A roving, careless knight of idleness and fortune—not an adventurer; for no man with a country and friends is that—but a mere licensed seeker of modes for the dissipation of ennui. So here he was at fifty-odd, flippant, light-hearted, philosophical, hard-drinking;

a sneer for an enemy, a smile for a friend; brave as a lion at heart, strong as an ostrich at belt; tolerant of all men's weaknesses (his own included) and contemptuous of nothing save malice or sham. Content, too, apparently, to eke out existence on a mere pittance from his pen, chiefly because that seemed to him the easiest way and because the atmosphere that surrounded him was congenial.

There was one mystery with respect to the Commodore that his friends had long abandoned as hopeless. No one knew where he lived and he never volunteered any facts on the subject. It was within walking distance of *The Fang* office; for he was in the habit of declaring, with much bitterness, that riding in street-cars was a luxury beyond the reach of a poor man, with whiskey so expensive. But whether his house was a palace or a hovel, a frowsy garret or an elaborate apartment, none could tell, and for that matter, indeed, it is extremely doubtful whether any one cared.

To Eustace Gaunt he had unbent sufficiently to give him more of his confidence than he usually vouchsafed to any one. The younger man, recognizing the limitations of his own experience and reading, found, in occasional association with the elder, a distraction that he would otherwise have lacked. He was flattered by the friendship of a man so much older and wiser than himself and all of whose moral shortcomings failed to conceal his attributes of gentility and race. In his conversations with Ellis he discovered an avenue of temporary escape from his own reflections—a boon for which his craving, during the last few months, had increased. In the heart of this quaint old social recluse—"Old Soak," as he was jocosely termed by some of his friends—there lurked a kindly philosophy and quiet patience inexpressibly restful to weary minds. It was in this last respect that the Commodore most sharply differed from his fellow-reprobate, Captain Clapham. Both were sad tipplers, true; but the Commodore exhibited heart and brilliancy and brains in his cups. No one denied the

Captain's possession of a heart, but his brains were below the belt.

In the absences of the new editor, which were frequent, Ellis and Gaunt spent a good many hours in *The Fang* office together, and it was in this way that their companionship found opportunities to strengthen and solidify. The young man was working hard—harder than he had ever worked in his life before. In addition to his regular duties on the paper, he continued to produce novelettes for Major Plum's quarterly—rather weird efforts they were, but sufficiently execrable in moral tone to command large sales—and after the hour of uninterrupted labor that the occasional miraculous absence of din in the outer office permitted, it was an easy matter to poke the Commodore out of his doze with a two-foot rule and induce him to converse.

On the afternoon of this specimen day in *The Fang* office that had witnessed the Fluttering Trio's piracy of the Major and the customary hari-kari of his cats, there had been a period of peace as unusual as it was delicious. The Major had remained away and the cats had slept. No caller had entered with a bludgeon in his hand and hate in his heart and no stenographer had bleated for a new set of teeth. Sweet quietude had reigned in the sanctum for nearly three hours, during which a full chapter had been added to a novel descriptive of life in Chicago, and the Commodore had snored gently many times up and down the scale. It was almost time to start uptown, and to have left the office without the advent of some circumstance distinctly diverting would have established a new record. This was not to be.

The editor came in blithely. He had been delving in old book-shops and had a load of treasures under either arm. He deposited them carefully on his desk and lit the usual cigarette. Before the Commodore was fairly awake, there was a shuffling of uncertain feet beyond the glass door and the Cynical Paragrapher entered, obliquely and with some violence.

"Hello, Rollo," chirruped the editor; "brought your copy in early, haven't you?"

"No, Uncle George," was the reply, delivered with dignity; "haven't gorrany copy."

"Then what do you want here?" This very severely.

"Sixty!" With the word the Cynical Paragrapher waved his arms comprehensively about his head.

All laughed.

The newcomer, with some deliberation, proceeded to dust the seat of a chair with his bare palm and then plant himself at a small desk in the corner, maintaining his equilibrium with an effort. He drew a sheet of paper towards him and scribbled a few words upon it. "Come here, fellows," he commanded, when he had finished, "and witness this."

"What is it, Rollo?" asked the editor curiously.

"My will."

"Your will! Who said you were going to die?"

"My doctor said I'd die if I got drunk again an' I'm going to prove him right or blast his reputation forever. He may be right and I must make my will. Won' you winness me will?" His tones grew plaintive. "*Please* winness me will!"

"All right, Rollo," agreed his friend indulgently, as he attested the paper without reading; "but what have you got to leave to anybody?"

"Sixty dollars. Major owes it me."

"Whom have you left it to, Rollo?" inquired the Commodore.

"My dog."

"What can he do with it?"

"He may never get it."

All smiled.

Poor Rollo laid his head upon his folded arms on the desk and dropped asleep without much effort. The other three men chatted on unimportant topics, and the afternoon breeze whispered through the window, exquisite with the springtime odor of flowers.

In five minutes the Major charged in, waughing energetically and scattering his cats. He seemed inclined to frown upon the indolent attitudes of his staff, but brightened at sight of the promising pile of "copy" on his son-in-law's table. Spying the bowed head of the Cynical Paragrapher, he turned to his editor and looked solicitous. "Too bad," he sighed, with the fervor of a sincere temperance exhorter. "He'll have jim-jams some day, if he keeps on."

"Rollo" woke up suddenly. "I know I'll have jim-jams," he confessed, in broken tones. "I know I'm going to have 'em now. *But that's no reason why I shouldn't be paid.*" He began to weep bitterly.

All laughed heartily, including the Major. The latter, viewing with apprehension a tendency on the part of the sufferer to froth at the mouth and bite the furniture, bounced into the outer office and returned presently with a check. It was part of the policy of *The Fang* to invariably settle an overdue account when the debtor showed an inclination to become violent. The receipt of his "sixty" calmed the Cynical Paragrapher to such an extent that he tore up his last will and testament and invited the Major to go with him into "Del's" and cash the check. In the hubbub that followed the proposition, the Commodore and Gaunt escaped.

As they walked up Broadway together, the latter remarked: "This is about the time of the day the effects of that infernal malaria begin to wear off. In an hour I shall be able to forget that it is certain to fetch me again to-morrow."

The Commodore eyed his companion rather closely as he slouched along at his side. "Rake the cobwebs out of your mind, my boy," he advised, "and the malaria will soon fly out of your skin. It's a sorry pest, but it's mostly mental, after all."

"And if," inquired his friend carelessly, "the blue devils won't down—what then?"

"In that case," replied the Commodore, with a firm glance

of his steely blue eyes, "I should suspect you of lacking in grit, and I'm not going to do that yet. What the deuce have you to feel blue about, I should like to know?"

"Nothing whatever," admitted Gaunt stoutly.

"Good enough," applauded the yachtsman—with another keen look, however—"of course you haven't. Here we are at the Gilsey. Let's look in."

It was the habit of most members of *The Fang* staff to make from four to five stops, in the course of a walk to Forty-second Street. The practice of drinking in Broadway cafés is a fashion rather than a vice. Few persons would indulge in it if they did not feel certain of finding friends similarly occupied. The vulgarity of any fashion loses its horror with custom. To Gaunt, at this time, there was nothing repulsive in conviviality indulged in in the presence of strangers of dubious repute.

The Commodore set down his glass with a long sigh of content. "I believe," he declared, blinking his eyes rapidly, "that I enjoyed that—almost as much as you enjoyed yours."

"It's a silly habit after all," admitted Gaunt, "and yet I imagine there are few of us who could get along without it. I couldn't, with this infernal malaria."

The old sailor looked concerned. "It seems ridiculous for me to preach on such a subject," he asserted modestly, "and yet I'm sorry to hear you speak like that. You shouldn't—at your age."

"Why?"

The younger man smiled cynically as he uttered the query.

"Because"—the Commodore was very sober, and therefore solemn in proportion—"well, I should be sorry for you, if for no other reason, because of the suffering you will endure when you stop taking stimulants altogether."

"Why should I stop?"

"Your health will demand it or you will decide to of your own accord, just because it is a way some decent men

have—to want to cease making animals of themselves, just for a change. I know it, because I once stopped drinking myself."

Gaunt politely tried not to look his disbelief. "How was that?" he asked curiously.

"I had been with a party of Englishmen prospecting in Honduras. Swift lot—brandy pawnee for breakfast and all that sort of thing. I had been going it pretty hard. I was like you—full of malaria to my very bones. Doctors ordered me to stop it and—well, I did."

"And?"

The Commodore looked more solemn than ever. "I would very much rather die," he said simply, "than go through the same thing again. Excuse my saying it, old man, but that's why I'm sorry to see you getting into the same boat."

"I don't quite understand."

"You don't? Then I'll explain. After all, I'm older than you, and you won't take it amiss. Moderate drinking never harmed any man, but very few have the wit to drink moderately. Drinking is hurting a man directly he begins to lean on it as a prop. You are doing that, my boy."

"Really," expostulated the subject of this rather vigorous stoning from a glass house, "I think you're a bit severe, Commodore. You know I never drink to excess."

"Ah, that's just it! You mean you never get drunk. Why, it's the fellows who go on prodigious sprees and then stop it altogether who are all right. It's you steady drinkers who keep just 'on edge'—that is to say, who drink just enough to buoy themselves up and keep up an artificial exhilaration—who are coming to grief some day."

"But you're pretty good evidence yourself, Commodore," laughed Gaunt, "that the gentle practice of tippling, if one really wishes, may be kept up indefinitely. You say you had to stop, but—well, you're enjoying yourself now, aren't you?"

The Commodore looked the least bit guilty. "Yes," he

admitted softly, "I stopped—because I had to. I began again—because I had to. I continue, frankly, because I have to. And—pardon me again!—I'm sorry to see you getting into my fix, because you're getting there twenty years too soon."

"Into your fix? What is that?"

"Drink," declared the Commodore, growing more oracular as he felt the necessity for being impressive, "is the greatest curse"—he took a hearty swig at his tumbler—"known to man. Physical curse, I mean; I don't care anything about the moral part of it. It's a curse wholly because of its after-effect. Yet if there were no after-effect we'd drink twice as much as we do now, and we couldn't very well afford to do that, could we?"

"But about the 'fix,' Commodore."

"Easily explained, my boy: The man who drinks deliberately, and with a purpose, simply to escape a line of thought he finds unpleasant, is to my mind, next door to an idiot. Your merely convivial drunkard is a Solomon to him. Why is he an idiot? Because, as I say, there will come a time when he will either have to stop or develop into a sot. In the latter case he is of course despicable and undeserving of any one's concern. In the former he is indeed done for; because, deprived of his remedy, his gloom will overwhelm him utterly. The unpleasantnesses he has been avoiding with the help of stimulants will reveal themselves more hopelessly when he ceases their use. Infinitely more suicides are caused by swearing off than by getting drunk."

"And still you'd advise me to swear off?"

"By no means. But I'd advise you to get into a frame of mind where wine is a beverage for you instead of a drug. You've a hard spell before you if you don't."

"Then your drinking, Commodore, is—ahem!—purely convivial?"

The young man regretted the words the instant they were spoken. They brought for a moment into the battered vet-

eran's blue eyes a misty, far-away look—the look of a man whose memories, even in the sunset of his days, give him no rest. Then he glanced at his friend frankly. "I deserved that," he confessed, "for my preaching. Besides, I told you I continued because I had to. That ought to cover everything."

"Is that absolutely correct?" persisted Gaunt, curiously. "Do you mean me to believe, Commodore, that a man as old as you are, and as brave, and as clever, is compelled to go on drinking whiskey every day whether he wishes to or not?"

The Commodore blinked and nodded gravely. "A man is never drinking too much whiskey," he declared, "until it distresses him to drink none. It's when he has to drink to keep his nervous system in order that the slavery begins. That's why I want to keep you out of my fix."

"Ah, your 'fix' again! And that is—"

"Briefly, that no matter what the reason"—the misty look came into the speaker's eyes again—"I have reached a point where insobriety is preferable to rational action and thought. Personally I hate drunkenness—in others. It causes so much misery. I have a good constitution, which must of course go to smash sometime. But if I knew that this drink were going to kill me"—the tumbler was emptied again—"I would still take it, because abstinence, at my age, would mean so much more lingering a death."

"That means that you'd rather die drinking than live without it?"

"Precisely."

"You are not in the habit of admitting that to people, Commodore. Why do you admit it to me?"

"To keep you out of my fix." The Commodore was getting the merest trifle shaky. "Let's have just one more and then we'll go."

"No, indeed," laughed Gaunt. "You have one; I won't. You've frightened me, Commodore. I'm going to swear off."

Major Plum came ploughing into the café at great speed. His salutations were as spectacular as usual. He insisted on Ellis "joining us" at dinner. "The young man hasn't asked me," he explained heartily, "but I've invited myself. Waugh!"

On most days this was true enough. The Commodore was always welcome. The three walked up Broadway together to the hotel at which the Gaunts were temporarily living. The conversation was divided betwixt the older twain, Gaunt's thoughts being busy with the Commodore's revelations and his own malaria. For the first time that he could remember in some years, a life with less indulgence in it seemed desirable.

At the apartment, having been duly welcomed by Agnes Plum Gaunt, he heard an aggressive rustle of skirts in the sitting-room beyond the hallway. The Major was already there and the smack echoed like a pistol-shot. Miss Dearthing fluttered into view, cooing pleasantly: "I've come to dinner, too. Aren't you glad?"

The Commodore turned aside and groaned. Gaunt, observing a tray of glasses on the sideboard, charged at it greedily and emptied the Major's as well as his own. The Commodore's sermon had been driven from his mind.

CHAPTER XXXI

A SUNBEAM AND A BEAR

Mrs. Teddy Lighthouse, sunburned as a gipsy and graceful as a sonnet, reclined in a wicker chair on the polished after-deck of the *Truth*. The *Truth* was her gallant Teddy's own pet yacht, holder of the record for nearly everything desirable, from a yatchtsman's view-point, on the lake. The yacht was now slicing the water under the mountain-side like a knife, leaving a clean-cut coil of yeasty foam in her

wake; and when her skipper, Teddy himself, came aft, there was a light of pride in his eye, the responsibility for which was shared equally by his craft and his lady.

The husband cast himself with luxurious inelegance on a mat at the lady's feet and fished in his pockets for his pipe.

"Well, Sunbeam," quoth he.

"Well, Bear," smiled the wife, indulgently; "is the ship safe, without your guidance?"

"She will run on no rock," was the solemn reply; "Old Jack Potts is at the wheel." ("Old Jack Potts," it may be explained here, was mountaineer, guide, man-of-all-work, and general trusty cuss, who could steer a yacht past a headland or a four-card flush through a bluff, with equal nerve. His real name—and he looked it—was Dope—John Dope.)

"Then," declared Mrs. Teddy, with a smile like a rainbow, and more indulgently than ever, "you may stay here and be nice to me." She thrust four slender fingers into the mop-like hair of her lord and affected to drag him to her side, as if he had been a large dog or sofa-cushion. He, to do him justice, assisted in the operation willingly enough, moving closer and leaning against her chair contentedly. The pipe completed his comfort.

Some discerning friend of theirs once said that the reason for the mutual fondness of the Lighthouses lay in the physical contrast that they contrived to present in summer. Certainly no contrast could have been sharper. Mrs. Teddy was slim of form, and, in an afternoon toilette of rare device, made as sweet and delicate a picture as her artist-husband ever contrived to paint. Added to the gentleness of her face there shone from her tranquil eyes the great and abiding glory of Brains—and oh, ye Bears of all dates and ages, when Brains are added to beauty and gentleness in your wives, do ye ever regret the hopelessness of your slavery? So much, then, for the lady's share of the contrast. Her husband, a very model and mirror of fashion when in town,

in winter, took his pleasure in summer in looking a little more disreputable than the lowliest of the fishermen. He wore hobnailed boots, corduroy trousers and a coarse hickory shirt that he resolutely refused to change. In addition, he made his summer exile the pretext for growing his beard. His wife insisted, bitterly, that his beard gave him the aspect of a ruffian, his clothes that of a vagrant. That, undoubtedly, was why she called him her Bear. His reasons for calling her his Sunbeam were too obvious to require analysis.

If either of these two ridiculously happy persons had been asked just now what thing or condition they most enjoyed in life, they would have responded, in a brisk duet: "The present moment." Looking at them, you could believe it.

There was ground for sentiment in the scene. The sun was slanting down on the mountains to the left, and the yacht, in her glory of gilt railings and spruce white paint, spun over a surface as smooth as glass. "Bear," confessed Mrs. Lighthouse softly, the slender fingers still busy with her liege lord's mane, "at such times as this, I forget even the brutality of your physical being. You are almost interesting."

"Sunbeam," was the grateful response, "*you* are endurable at any stage, but when you talk like that you are heavenly." He disinterred the slender fingers from his hair adroitly, and kissed them.

And these twain had been married ten years. Oh, wonderful!

"Old Jack Potts" turned in his place at the wheel and his great voice came down the deck in a mellow bellow: "Where to now, Mr. Teddy? Shall I take her in?"

"Not on your life, Jim," replied the skipper, cheerily; "we're going to the Major's to dinner. Steer past the Island and give the old gentleman three whistles to wake him up."

The yacht wheeled gracefully over the wide bay, the massive back and shoulders of the helmsman making a healthy picture against its background of water and sky.

"On such a day, Sunbeam," vouchsafed Teddy Lighthouse, loyally, "I can't for the life of me help feeling sorry for those less happy than we."

"Hush!" commanded his wife, with grave reproof; "don't begin gossiping about your neighbors at your time of life."

"Who on earth was gossiping?" demanded Teddy.

"You, you old ruffian. At least, if you were not gossiping you were making covert insinuations, and that's the same thing—or worse."

"Well," growled the Bear dutifully, "I accept the rebuke; but if I were some people I know, I'd jump in the lake."

"So he does," answered Mrs. Teddy, musingly, "and swims for miles. I've seen him do it."

"*Now*, who's insinuating?"—This in tones of masculine triumph.

"Oh, don't be foolish," begged the lady, into whose bright face the cloud of a certain sadness had stolen; "that is," she added, with an adorable look, and another clutch at the skipper's matted crown, "not more foolish than you can help. Sometimes I feel so sorry for those people I scarcely know what to say to them. I wonder what on earth made them do it?"

"Conundrums," declared her husband, growing solemn in his turn, and lumbering to his feet as gracefully as if he really had four of them instead of two, "always destroy my appetite. And I always get too good a dinner at the Major's as a rule, to allow me to run any chances with it."

"You don't deserve any dinner," vowed his wife, with a fine scorn, "in those clothes."

For answer, the Bear proved his right to his name. It was one of the most beautiful and child-like traits in the characters of these two, that they chose to ignore utterly the witnessing by yokel servants of their love-making. The lady, the ordeal of the embrace over, remarked without con-

cern the hopeless rumpling of her dress, and, though continuing to view with disdain the gross apparel of the despoiler, concurred in his view that no formality was likely to be exacted at The Island. So they stood presently, arm-in-arm, on the deck of their little ship, absorbing together the glory of mountain and lake and sky—all alone, in a sense, for one moment, with themselves and their affection. Such moments, for those that know them, make Life. Without them, there is no Life.

Heigho, for another contrast. Round the sharp-jutting nose of The Island swept the trim little craft, courtesying gracefully as she bent her way through the narrow channel. The horny fingers of "Old Jack Potts" jerked the cord and the whistle of the *Truth* gave three startling squeals in deference to the Major's tall flagstaff, from which the stars and stripes proudly floated. Then the racket and hullabaloo. The devoted Lighthouses were honored guests in those parts, and their arrival was a matter of importance. The figure of the Major, expanding and throbbing, as usual, with its seething surplus of vitality, was silhouetted, for a moment, against the horizon as it stood on the headland, waving and shouting a boisterous welcome. It then bounced and ploughed its way down the rocky path, accompanied by the full pack of hounds, gaily a-yelp, to the dock, where it arrived in plenty of time to greet the yacht. The *Truth* was made fast and "Old Jack Potts" and the engineer sent home happy, in a rowboat, with two dollars apiece for the inauguration of the poker game in their own boathouse. And so:—on up the path, the Major leading the lady with the gallantry of the born cavalier; the knightly Teddy following dutifully behind. On, in sprightly fashion to the veranda, where the lanterns are lit, presently to meet the dusk, and where a company full of enthusiasm is already assembled. Familiar figures, mostly. The array of fluttering girlhood, the individual make-up of which is of no importance, but which is led, valiantly, by Miss Dearthing, and who smacks the warrior-king of the Island vigorously

and in proprietary fashion, as a punishment for his absence, or a reward for his return, one scarcely knows which. The good old Commodore standing sturdily in the background, with a genial eye on the bottle; inside the Castle the glow of brilliant lamps, and the unmistakable preparations for an occasion of enthusiasm. On the veranda a sprightly mixed company, all laughing and talking at once, with the baying of dogs for accompaniment.

Into the maelstrom of gaiety the Lighthouses plunged cheerily; for the most sentimental folk in the world like such contrasts occasionally. Nor was their enjoyment wholly selfish; for they both knew there was one member of the company to whom their coming was a godsend.

CHAPTER XXXII

HILARITY AT A HOUSE-PARTY

Major Plum's house-party, that summer, was sufficiently diversified in make-up to suit all tastes. Besides the group of attractive girls and companionable men with which he always contrived to surround himself, there were some people of consequence. Three or four army men, a couple of engaged lovers, proteges of Agnes Gaunt, Mrs. "Jim" Pledge, a lively young Southern matron from Alabama, as brilliant as she was beautiful, and several more. Such a company, reinforced, as it was, at intervals each day by squadrons of visitors from the hotels on the mainland, could not fail to satisfy ordinary social appetite or produce all necessary enlivenment.

This island home in the lake was a charming spot for such a house-party, and guests were left largely to their own devices for entertainment, after the hospitable English fashion. There were boats in which to row and explore the thousand charming little bays and inlets along the shore. There were

ives along tortuous and precipitous mountain roads, be-
nd lean and wiry horses that went like the wind. There
as the Major's smart naphtha launch for sailing parties
mposed of the lazier or more sedate; there were fishing
ds and guns in plenty for the men and hammocks strung
nooks in which girls might dream and attitudinize. There
ere bathing parties every afternoon at the Major's boat-
ouse, where the entire guest-list of the Castle assembled,
ou may be sure, to see the wondrous sights, aquatic and
atomical, there presented. Feats of diving and swimming
the athletes of the household and poems in posing by its
aiads. The latter at times, made a spectacle as pleasant as
y seen in those parts, at which times the shrieks of rapture
d merriment could be heard for miles.

A region, one would say, of heavenly scenery and infinite
rthly enjoyment—for persons of clear conscience and
bit. Beings of other grades find little happiness any-
here. Major Plum and his son-in-law shared the main-
nance of the Island Castle between them, an arrange-
ent that operated to the satisfaction of both and that re-
oved at least one name from *The Fang's* salary list. They
ade the journey to town, generally in each other's com-
ny, once a week, remaining there long enough to see the
per put to press and returning for a brief three days of
ountain bliss by the early boat on Thursday morning.
ew York, as every one knows, is insufferable in July and
gust, and leaving aside the question of the weekly jour-
y, which was fatiguing, the summer habitation in the
ountains suited Gaunt very well. When not interrupted,
could do his writing for the paper as readily in the coun-
as in the town. He performed these literary labors in
e tent given over at night to the Major's bachelor guests
d there were frequently days upon which he was allowed
e luxury of solitude for as long as two hours at a stretch.
is domestic life so far had been without important detail
incident. He and Agnes Gaunt agreed, when they spoke
all of the matter, that they were fortunate in living a life

so full of interruptions from other people that it gave neither of them time for the discovery of disagreeable qualities in the other. The constant parade and succession of visitors filled the nights and days, affording various diversions and rendering a *tete-a-tete* an impossible luxury and no complaint concerning that condition was offered by either interested party. Some modern couples betwixt whom a ceremony of marriage has passed would have regarded it as an ideal arrangement.

Between such times as he was not writing, or engaged in some agreeable pastime on land or water with the men—to most ladies of the Major's house-parties he could never summon the fortitude to be even passably civil—Gaunt found himself in the possession of opportunities for a study that perplexed as greatly as it amused him. The subject of the study was the condition wrought upon his own mind by his partial following of the advice laid down to him with such delicious frankness by "Commodore" Cortlandt Ellis. The conversation with the latter in the Gilsey House café on that afternoon in the spring, on the subject of continuous drinking, had been crowded from his mind soon afterwards by the pressure of unavoidable events; but within the last few weeks, towards the end of the summer, he had been compelled, willingly or unwillingly, to recall it. Deciding of his own accord, and chiefly for reasons of weariness with the sight of their perpetual effect upon others, to lessen his use of stimulants, he was mystified by the influence that the step exercised upon his sentiments and moods. He found, for example, that the first two or three hours of the day, if passed without a revivifying drink, were almost unendurable—a sort of extended companion-piece to the waking hour of reflection and exhaustion that had occasioned him such distress about the time of his leaving for Florida. The malaria of that state, from which he still suffered, enhanced his moodiness. If the periods of abstinence were prolonged, the condition of mental disquiet, of restless depression, was aggravated and intensified;

and it was not until the advent of the luncheon-hour, and its decanters, that the world began to look at all habitable or decent. Coupled with the emotion of relief produced by this midday indulgence, came one of disgust—self-disgust most profound and absolute—that it should be essential to his comfort; whilst the sight of his companions at the table, enjoying themselves, rationally or irrationally, but obviously without any such disquieting reflections, impressed him as both inharmonious and unfair. Afterwards, when engaged in his work, or when rowing upon the lake, or shooting among the hills, he found passing forgetfulness of his nervousness or gloom; but when it returned it was with redoubled force—a steady, penetrating insistence from which there was absolutely no escape, except through an appeal to a flask. The depression itself was vague and indefinable. Upon his mind there was at this time no distinct misery or grief, only a violent, and to him utterly unreasonable, darkness of the universe and weariness with life. With nightfall came the dinner—then, as ever, the all-important event of life on The Island!—and it afforded, as it had the year before, a diversion before which the grimness of the day underwent an at least partial abatement. In sleep, when it was obtainable, there was an even more grateful respite; and the victim of this experience, in spite of the odd sensations it brought him, persevered in his course of partial abstinence. When he was not half prostrated by his blue devils, he felt both curious and entertained, and he became interested in noting the degree in which his symptoms aggravated themselves as he gradually drew the rein tighter on the habit that formed the only path toward forgetfulness that he knew. Even now, the proportions to which he had reduced his indulgence would scarcely have been approved by a temperance advocate, though they brought him much good-natured chaff from the more seasoned tipplers of the company. The military veterans were especially attentive in the matter of gibes, it being their theory that a guest who weakened in the punishment of supplies was deficient either

in capacity or courage and equally blameworthy, whichever it might be.

It was a rather quaint experience for the young man when there was added to his already choice variety of sensations the one of sudden and unusual mental contemplation of death. In his thirty-two years of life he had never given the subject of death a serious thought—an oversight common enough with individuals who enjoy good health—and when it entered his mind, without apparent excuse, but with an evident intention to remain there, he was at a loss to account for the circumstance. It did not cause him any sharp unrest or apprehension, only an intense annoyance. He was not so enamored of life as to yearn for its indefinite prolongation, but he was incensed at the mental condition that compelled him, however reluctantly, to hold in his mind's eye a contingency that most of us avoid considering until invited to do so by an officious and inconsiderate doctor. It seemed both ridiculous and undignified. Fancy it! —lying in a hammock, healthy, hearty and athletic to all outward seeming—a perfect atmosphere—emerald trees and an opal sky—a perfect cigar—all these conditions, if you please, and a mind captured and permeated by a vagrant and impossible idea of approaching dissolution! Unheard-of freak of diseased imagining! The incident that led to it was dramatic, or at least out of the groove of the commonplace, and deserves detailed description, if only for the importance of the effect that it created and the results to which it led.

It was the custom in that part of the country to hold, toward the end of each season, a regatta in which the young people from all points along the lake assembled to exhibit their prowess with the oars. Major Plum was generally a member of the Regatta Committee and conspicuous in its councils. His guests naturally shared his interest in the affair. On this occasion he had taken from The Island, in his launch, a large party, charged with the task of decorating the ball-room of one of the hotels on the mainland, where the festivities incidental to the regatta were to be

brought to a conclusion with a dance. Laden with goldenrod, harebells and vari-colored leaves, the ladies completed their gracious task and the expedition was returning to the Island for luncheon when, just as the launch was leaving the little dock, Ellis and Gaunt came plunging down the hillside, with guns over their shoulders, and hallooed to it to stop. They had had a long tramp, and a further stroll of a mile in the hot sun to their own boat was not to their taste. The launch was crowded, but the Commodore managed to squeeze in, his companion taking his place in a light cedar skiff, the rearmost of two boats the Major was towing astern. The trip was begun at high speed and would have terminated without mishap if Gaunt, when a quarter of a mile from The Island, had not risen, with the idea of cutting loose and rowing ashore. The speed at which the skiff was traveling prevented the successful execution of the maneuver, and it overturned instantly, precipitating its occupant into water something like a hundred feet deep. When he rose to the surface the launch and its two trailing boats, the hinder one, of course, waterlogged, were far away and the chorus of feminine wails inspired by the catastrophe resembled nothing so much as a concert of steam siren-whistles under full pressure. The victim of his own carelessness was not in the water longer than ten minutes, at the end of which time Jerry had contrived, with a swiftness of movement wholly foreign to his habit, to get to his side with the dry boat, but it was touch and go with him at the climax. His tight shooting-coat and load of cartridges, and his heavy boots, made the task of swimming one of extreme difficulty, and his cramp and exhaustion, when he grasped the outstretched hand of the pale but plucky Jerry, were both extreme. At the moment of rescue the wails from the launch were changed to paeans and when the flotilla reached the Island dock the scene was worthy the brush of a marine artist of renown. The soaked one received an embrace from his father-in-law that soaked that warrior's fine white flannel suit in turn and a handshake from each of the men that

proved their sincerity at least. Warm-hearted little Mrs. Pledge sat down on a rock and cried, the other ladies sympathized with her, and Miss Dearthing, with a cordial exposition of the divided teeth, exclaimed amiably, "You kept afloat cleverly, Mr. Gaunt—so cleverly I am almost tempted to believe you upset yourself on purpose." Agnes Gaunt, after the bestowal of congratulations, ran dutifully to the house for champagne with which to celebrate and lubricate the event of rescue; and so, all was happiness.

This episode of the snatching of a beloved object from a watery grave was made the pretext by Major Plum for a display of allied enthusiasm and hospitality beside which many previous ones paled. It began at luncheon, during which meal he called loudly, not once but many times, on each of his guests to drink to the health of his newly saved son. No one was loth to obey the bidding. Indeed, the joy extended, in a way, throughout the Island. Jerry, feeling himself quite safe from discharge for the rest of the year at least, fed the dogs and chickens extra rations. The serving-maids grinned amiably at Major Plum's pleasantries, and Black Sukey, the cook, made a special appropriation, for her own advantage and benefit, of an extra case of beer. Such clanging of glasses and clatter of voices never was heard. The bliss waxed more acute after luncheon, and the house-party went to the races royally feeling its oats. The applause elicited from the launch by the efforts of the contestants was charged with an effective continuity and shrillness; whilst the voice of Major Plum, bawling across the waters at times through a megaphone, had the confident ring of a conqueror. Great sport and great patronage, my hearties. Then the dinner—and a special Regatta Day dinner, mind you, with the Ruinart on ice, the cook on edge and the dogs on the verandas a-yowl for bones! The dinner was magnificent, and while it lasted the hero-swimmer (by this time more than surfeited with his honors) was saved and toasted all over again. Still, even the dinner itself was eclipsed, after a fashion, by the ball at

the hotel, to which the Island cohorts sailed in a body, and at which certain of its members distinguished themselves after styles that the unlettered native populace will never forget. It is all down in the history of that quaint mountain clime. How the army veterans (brave souls!) stood about and ate cloves, and pulled their mustaches and ogled the village belles, to the latter's inexpressible confusion and delight. How little Mrs. Pledge, dainty as Dresden china and full of snap as tabasco, tucked up her skirts and did as pretty a "wing" as is ever seen in vaudeville. How the Commodore found an accommodating ruffian outside to fight with and sent him home in a wagon—and after him, gratefully, a half-keg of ale, as balm for his bruises. How Major John Plum, warrior-king of those bucolic parts, bucking friskily down the center, with Miss Dearthing for a partner, miscalculated his steps and sat upon the floor with a smash and a "Waugh!" that caused the hotel to heave and the ladies to shriek solicitously. There was singing on the lake on the way home that night, and more champagne broached when the Island was reached. Whoop and hilarity it was, till well on to dawn, and many times the Major felt called upon to berate the fates because he had no fireworks. He would have let off a ton if he had had them; and no one who witnessed his magnificent enthusiasm could doubt his affection for his son-in-law or his capacity for riot. An eventful day and night, surely. By the time it was all over the very dogs were silenced, and even the military had had enough.

So, then, the morning after all this festivity it was both astonishing and humiliating for its hero to find himself beset with a form of melancholia that he had hitherto escaped. He had kept his own conviviality fairly within bounds, and there was no very good reason for physical discomfort in his case. The general tendency, on the part of the Major's house-party, towards privacy and restoratives on this particular morning had left him a liberty that he knew how to appreciate, and he had spent two hours, indolently enough,

in a hammock, with a cigar for inspiration and a dog and his thoughts for company. These thoughts had taken various shapes, none of them of much importance, when they suddenly fixed themselves on the boating mishap of the previous day. The result was strange beyond measure.

During the immersion, and while he was realizing that it was a very even wager that he would go to the bottom before Jerry could reach him, he had been conscious of neither fear nor regret. He had felt, on the contrary, only a contempt for his own weakness, coupled, possibly, with a feeling of relief that he was about to be eased of certain responsibilities. Now that the strain was passed, and he recognized the closeness of the approach he had made to the other land, a vague feeling of dread took possession of him—a dread not of penalties that the other world might contain, but of the record of utter uselessness and folly that, if he were to die, he would leave behind him in this.

His sensations were not those of a coward, because there was no distinct emotion of personal fear. His distress sprang not only from the thought of all that he would leave undone, in the event of his death, but from the absolute lack of excuse for his harboring any such reflections at all. He began, suddenly, to feel weak and unstrung—and the dreamy panorama of water and sky and foliage waved before his eyes mistily. For the first time in his life the thought came—"what will it be like to lose these things *forever*?" and his senses swam, not with the horror of death, but with passionate resentment against the mental condition that forced him to look it in the face.

His misery grew. His wits—or the portion of them that was left—told him to get up, to move, to row, to ride—to do anything that would chase away the nightmare; but something told him, with remorseless certainty, that he was beset this time by an enemy from which there was no escape; that he would be pursued whithersoever he might go, and that the battle, whatever idiotic sort of battle it

was, might as well be fought here as elsewhere. With it all, there came an intense lassitude, which, if he had known it, was the cause that rendered the idea of violent physical action as grievous as the mental ordeal through which he was passing.

So he lay in his hammock in this queer mood of madness, amid this Island Paradise, for quite another hour, the wrens chirping overhead and the dog on the grass watching him with grave, attentive eyes. Fate, in one respect, was kind. It kept the array of fluttering girlhood away. In another, it was less indulgent; for the Major presently came along and deposited himself laboriously in a rustic garden-seat, with the obvious idea of conversation.

There were times when the Major's personal magnetism was less pronounced than at others. This was one of them. It was evident that even he, with his infinite stock of vitality, felt the effects of the past celebration. There were large puffs, indigo in tint, beneath his eyes, and his mouth had a look less good-natured than usual. His body relaxed, and distributed itself over the seat, and he permitted his head to rest upon his hand limply. A faint groan or two escaped him. It was not the attitude of a great man or a wise one. Even in his mental extremity Gaunt could not help smiling.

"Waugh!" sighed the Major gently. He coughed harshly and added: "Eustace, my boy, I've come to have a leetle talk with you."

"Yes," assented his son-in-law, without joy.

"Fact is," pursued the Major, gloomily, "the paper isn't doing as well as it might." He fumbled with some open letters in his hand, and then, lowering his brow again, groaned forth, "My head! Waugh!"

"I'm sorry," sympathized Gaunt, "but you can't expect me to look after your troubles as well as my own, Major. I'm a writer, you know; you're the business man of the concern."

"Yes," sighed the old warrior; "you do enough work,

Lord knows. I often wonder where you find time for it—and your books help us out, it's true. Sometimes I wish you'd write less and help me with a few—ahem!—ideas. Waugh!"

Gaunt rose on one elbow and looked his elderly relative frankly in the eyes. "What ideas?" he asked.

Marvel of marvels! All notion of the thrilling cause of the previous night's jollification and of the undying love that inspired it seemed to vanish from the publisher's ken. He straightened his back and roared, in terrible tones: "You know what I mean! *There's more ways than one of skinning a cat.*"

At such moments the Major's face was not an impressive sight. The expression of bluff and whole-souled good nature had quite vanished from it and one of acquisitiveness took its place.

The younger man, his brain busy with the tormenting thoughts of the last hour, and his nerves at a tension that threatened collapse, studied the Major's face for a moment. He caught himself wondering whether he could ever, by any possibility, look like that. He also felt in his own mind such a violent and inordinate craving for strong drink as he had never known in all his life before. He had combated this craving all the morning, and now he was ready to yield to it.

"Major," he said, speaking a little sharply and sitting erect, "we have had a few little love-passages on this line already, and it may be as well for you to understand my position clearly. Since joining your staff I have done the hardest newspaper work of my life—harder since I became your son-in-law than before, I think. You don't deny that, do you?"

The Major was beginning to look frightened. "My bo-oo-ooy!" he expostulated.

"All right," responded Gaunt, with a total lack of sympathy or contrition, "that much is understood, is it? Well,

then, listen: I write for and help edit your paper and I write you books that are profitable and I ask no questions and I get no pay—"

"My bo-oo-ooo-oy!" (This almost wildly.)

"All right, Major. Control your feelings. I'm not asking you for arrears of salary. What I am getting at is this:—you have, I suspect, certain commercial ideas of your own. That's what you mean, presumably, when you hint at cats and your skill as a taxidermist. You've been on the verge, frequently, of telling me things I am sure I don't want to know. If once you *do* tell me them, and they prove to be too tough, I shall have to leave your paper."

The Major lowered his eyes, drooped his mouth at the corners and permitted his shoulders to heave. As an emotional exhibit the effort was not convincing. It suggested the condemned's magnanimous pardon of the hangman. Only the dog looked sympathetic.

To Gaunt, the situation was intolerable. His condition, before the Major's arrival, was that of a man unstrung; and the conversation, with the sentiments of various kinds to which it had given rise, had produced an effect little short of maddening. He was about to spring from the hammock and run for it when he caught sight of Agnes Plum Gaunt coming across the lawn towards him with a well-filled glass in her hand. At that moment he almost loved her.

His motion of raising the glass to his lips was arrested by a speech from the Major that under the circumstances was a trifle humorous. "Ah, Eustace, my boy," he mourned, in accents of deepest affection, "I know what ails you. You drink too much whiskey."

Gaunt looked into the speaker's eyes, with the puffy blue pillows under them, and gasped, "WHA-A-AAT?"

"You drink too much whiskey," repeated the Major doggedly.

His son-in-law roared with laughter. "I believe I do," he assented, "but fancy your telling me so!" He gave the

Major another long, analytical look and added, as if to himself, "if that's the case I don't believe I'll drink any at all." Throwing the glass and its contents against a rock, he walked away in the direction of the boathouse, whistling.

"Ducks," demanded the old gentleman in a weak voice, ruefully sniffing at the moistened rock, "why in the dickens didn't you bring *me* some?"

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE DREAMER'S AWAKENING

The farce began with an apparent upheaval of two white cottages and a curious swaying of the entire eastern line of mountains. The victim studied these phenomena with an at least outward calmness. The sensations that they brought him were peculiar, but he had already faced others as formidable. It was his third day of total abstinence.

It was Sunday afternoon, and the steamer was leaving the dock at Hilltown, laden with passengers for the night train for New York. The scenes in the farce—which was unique among all farces, in that it was being played for the view of one solitary spectator's disordered fancy—followed one another rapidly. Some of the natives, massed, after their custom, on the dock, to witness the weekly event of the Major's departure, swelled to the proportions of giants, while others seemed to have become mere brownies and pygmies and danced about absurdly on the planks. Lagging wagons seemed to be moving with the speed of railroad trains; while two little fair-haired children, with a basket of trailing arbutus apiece, appeared to be dancing a minuet, when as a matter of fact they were standing stock still, intently watching the departure of the boat. The Commodore, blandly and benignly inebriated, stood at some little distance conversing with a native, and seemed to be spout-

ing not only oratory, but fire. The oddest scene of all, however, was confined to that section of the wharf where the array of fluttering girlhood had moored itself, and where, led by Miss Dearthing and chaperoned by nobody, it alternately wept and waved handkerchiefs at the receding figure of the Major, on the steamer's upper deck. In the farce, some of the array looked like sylphs, others like soubrettes, fantastically attired; and the ballet was led by Miss Dearthing, who, to this one bedeviled spectator's eyes, seemed to be possessed of a very large pair of eider-down wings, edged with a heavy plush fringe, and instead of her teeth, two long elephants' tusks with which she was trying to poke some of her rival coryphées overboard. It was this last scene—a rather exhausting one—that led the spectator, or victim, of the farce to push his fingers into his eyes, pull his nerves together and ask himself if he were about to be visited with an attack of delirium tremens.

It was not the first time he had asked himself the question in the last fifty hours; for one of the sharpest and promptest results of abstinence, after the long-continued use of stimulants, is the subject's mental certainty that he is about to be overtaken by all the horrors of which he ever heard or read. The apprehension of evil is more painful than anything that could be involved in its actual visitation; or at least physicians so declare, and of course they know. Gaunt, in this instance, had excuse for gratitude toward the partner of his island life, for she went skimming under the stern of the steamer in the launch and she at least looked natural. Then the whole atmosphere cleared in a measure. Still, while the monsters and absurdities disappeared from his brain, they were replaced by a profound, overwhelming depression and a steady succession of sombre thoughts almost as difficult to endure. Over there, the anticipation of impending calamity hovered like a cloud, augmenting his gloom and heightening the sense of physical weakness under which he now constantly labored. And yet, queerly enough, the more acute his discomfort, the firmer became his deter-

mination to adhere to the resolve that had occasioned it. He recognized the fact that the power exercised over him by a silly habit must have been regrettably strong if its discontinuance involved such suffering. He perceived, also, the advantages of escape from such dominion, and, tortured as he was at this moment by the attitude he had taken, he would have died rather than recede from it.

From the second day of his resolve, there had been lifted from the eyes of this blundering and inconsequential dreamer, Eustace Gaunt, the veil that had obscured certain ignominies of his past existence from the searchlight of his own observation. His understanding, deprived of the agreeable stimulative force that had enabled it to condone folly or remain blind to insupportable conditions, awoke to activity with a plunge. Reality took the stage and fancy fled, shuddering. The thin veneer of easy philosophy and cynicism with which he had covered his views of life, and utilized for the concealment of Reason, was removed by a ruthless hand, and the exposure of the quagmire beneath was disheartening and lamentable. The errors of his career grouped themselves before his mental vision in a sorry phalanx and the very contemplation of them was a bitterness and a nightmare. In the calm white light of Truth, the acts and consequences of successive years of folly appeared to him in their grotesque and naked enormity, making jest of his weakness and mockery of his remorse. It had seemed for a little while as if the world had tumbled to pieces, he receiving rough-and-ready burial in the ruins. Life had been swift and he had taken no time to think. Now, alas! he saw things clearly, clearly. He saw the path of a Man's duty grass-grown and choked with rank weeds. He saw himself in the mirror of his own soul, and was ashamed.

Following the first overwhelming conviction of his own unworthiness came the sense of physical collapse and the childish dread of invisible perils. The two days passed under these conditions were days not likely to be forgotten. Compelled to meet his friends and guests—not to mention

Major Plum and Agnes Gaunt—as usual, he was haunted by the humiliating belief that some evidence of the torment of his mind must show itself in his face. He was thankful, at last, for the perpetual family conviviality that perhaps spared him the ordeal of too close questioning. He had thought, throughout these two dire days, that perhaps when he was able to escape from the Island, his mental disorder might undergo some abatement. It was disheartening to find, when Sunday came, tardily, and he commenced his journey to town in company with the Major, that his trials had, apparently, only just begun.

He watched the trim naphtha launch dancing over the water far away and could faintly discern the figure of Agnes Plum Gaunt seated in the stern, opposite Jerry. She was waving a handkerchief to him; and like a flash, memory bore him back to a distant day when he had stood on the deck of a Lake Michigan steamer and watched two figures on a Michigan avenue porch, one of them that of—Good God! was that three years ago or only yesterday? And where had he been meanwhile? Was he drunk or sober—crazy or sane? Some vast weight seemed to be falling on him from the sky, striking him over the head—great sledge-hammer blows, like those a blacksmith deals the iron on his anvil. He rose to his feet trembling, and began to pace the deck. He put his hand to his forehead and, feeling the cold perspiration there, began looking about him aggressively, wondering in a savage way whether he were making an exhibition of himself, and if the other passengers were noticing it. The Major, happily, was already deep in his newspaper, after his usual habit, and would speak to no one for two hours. A mercy, perhaps, for if he had attempted to open a conversation with his son-in-law just then, the latter would have indubitably jumped overboard.

Nervous prostration, I believe the doctors call it. It is in many respects a most diverting malady, and its effects upon the sufferer vary according to his habits and temperament. It may be caused as readily by one form of excess

as another; an excess of worry, or a long mental strain will produce as nice a case as any yielded by excessive physical indulgence. In Gaunt's case the cause was two-fold, which accounted, possibly, for its violence.

A dozen times he walked through the long cabin, eyeing the men and women there sharply, as if he suspected them of harboring doubts of his sanity. He threw surreptitious glances into mirrors, in order to assure himself that he did not look as hopelessly irrational as he felt. Once, after satisfying himself that he was unobserved, he stopped and made a long study of himself, full length. He saw, in his reflection, the figure of a man irreproachably dressed, clean, and seemingly in the full flush of vigor and health. Looking more closely, he observed the ungraceful lines, the tendency toward grossness that in men of his years is quite inexcusable. He saw in his face the imprints and marks not, perhaps, of actual dissipation, but of too generous living—signs that when seen in the human face point infallibly to a long surrender to the senses. He recalled his old fastidiousness on such points, and, with the evidence of his physical deterioration sneering at him from the mirror, his self-contempt increased immeasurably. He realized in this brief scrutiny how the animal in him had gained ascendency, stifling every better and gentler feeling that he ever possessed; and he began to reflect that no matter who might forgive him, he could never forgive himself.

He could neither remain still nor concentrate his thoughts. He tried to read, but the lines zig-zagged loosely before his eyes and the very idea of considering the mere news of the world seemed inviting a useless burden and fatigue. Before his mind swung, ever and always, this ludicrous spectre of Death, making a mould for his absurd speculations and queries. Why, he wondered, should white-haired statesmen worry over national problems—when they themselves were to die so soon? Of what use were governments, or laws, or armies, or vast projects in politics and commerce, when the end of all was bound to be the same,

some day? How could all these people on this very boat be so idiotically happy and careless, realizing, as they must, the worthlessness, if not the brevity, of life? There were two extremes within sight, even now: a smartly attired little girl of eight and an old, old man with serene eyes and a patriarchal white beard. The child was leaning over the rail, laughing with delight at the sun-flecked foam churned up by the paddle-wheel. Her grandfather, with a hand carefully clutching her dress, was placidly smoking a cigar and gazing with evident enjoyment on the splendid natural panorama passing before his eyes. Viewing the content of the pair, Gaunt felt both amazed and incensed. What right had that old man, who certainly could not have many more years to live, to such peace of mind when he, Gaunt, less than half his age, felt certain that his life was done. The next instant he had realized the idiocy of his line of mental argument and trembled once more with the old dread that he might be going insane. He wished a hundred times for a doctor, and then dismissed that idea as ridiculous, too; for there was no human being, man or woman, physician or priest, to whom he would have confessed his thoughts just then.

It seemed to him, as the steamer neared the end of the lake, as if the journey had lasted a hundred years. The next instant, he was wishing it had just begun, for he shuddered like a frightened child at the sight of the darkening skies and wondered what new horrors of reflection he would undergo when ashore. In point of fact it was one of the most exquisite nights of a late summer, in which a week ago he could have taken all delight possible. Now, as he walked through the hotel grounds with the Major, he was able to converse with apparent intelligence on commonplace topics, but his brain was drumming into his ears the same monstrous query: "Of what use is it all?—what use?—what use?"

No man who has been pursued and haunted by that dark idea through the long months of a gradual spiritual awaken-

ing, ever quite forgets it. The memory will cling to him for the rest of his life, or for so long as he remains decent. It brought to Eustace Gaunt, simultaneously with his own chastisement, a sudden sympathy and toleration for the failings of others. He could remember the time when the ordeal of one of these *tete-a-tete* Sunday night suppers with the Major, with their inevitable odor of beefsteak and beer, would have bored him beyond endurance. In his new mood of self-condemnation and terror, he faced this marvelous old man, whom a freak of fate had made his father-in-law, and studied him with a new interest. He noticed, in the glare of the electric lights—monstrosities, alas! that penetrate even to our loveliest summer wildernesses!—how very old, and, on occasion, how very wolfish, the Major was beginning to look. So viewing him, his brain galloping over the gamut of events that had linked the Major's life to his own, he felt sorry—yes, he actually felt, in a way, *as if he had wronged him.* Preposterous unreason, born of reaction after long license! True, the Major had * * * * and he had * * * * Pah! There came the helter-skelter tumult of lugubrious thoughts again, chasing themselves adown and across one another and rendering lucid or coherent reflection an impossible feat. Once, like a flash from a lime-light, the sufferer saw McLaren sitting there, as in that other summer night, smirking with his jolly round face, and heard the voice of an unknown tenor ringing across the moon-lit water in "The Palms." Was *that* years ago, too, or only yesterday, like the lavender gloves and the luncheon at the Richelieu? O, inexorable fate, strutting and striding beside your victim and flogging him mercilessly at every step! A sad, sad jumble it is, and in its midst—

"Waugh!" breathed the Major, flourishing his fork, "have a cognac with me."

"No," says the crazy person, though every fibre and morsel of his being is counseling him—"take it. It will bring you peace."

"Well," is the Major's half-offended response, "a swear-

off is a good thing, my boy, but don't let it make you a prig."

The night express for New York started. The long line of sleeping-cars went lumbering up the mountain, their lights casting quaint patterns on sleepy hedgerows and tapering pines. Puffing and grunting with its load, the engine reached the summit, crossed it, and descended with a shriek and a roar into the valley. That valley, crossed by a hundred hedges and brooks, and lit to a gentle radiance by the moon, looked like some fantastic elfin domain of the Night, fair, oh, far too fair for common mortal ownership! And in his berth, screened by friendly curtains and secure from all eyes save his own—the very glance, forsooth, that he was most ashamed to meet!—lay the awakened Dreamer, staring out of his open window into God's beautiful fields, and wishing with all his heart that the rushing train would leap the track and strike him dead.

CHAPTER XXXIV

REACTION

It was Gaunt's habit, on returning to New York on a Monday morning, to bathe and dress at the Athletic Club near by in preference to going to the apartment up town which he and the Major's daughter had taken before leaving for the Lake. It was near to the office, and a plunge in the swimming tank was always refreshing in hot weather. On this trip he had slept little since daylight, lying awake instead, and wearily noting the passing of landmarks along the Hudson River. The Major and he separated at the station, to meet at the office later, and he wondered, stupidly, if he had succeeded to the very last in concealing his peculiar mental condition from his relative.

He found, on stepping into the street, that the heat and

noise embarrassed him frightfully. He felt a swift rage against the bawling jehus with their "Keb! Keb!! Keb!!!" and a nervous dread of the screeching newsboys—both of them sensations that had never before assailed him on similar occasions. There was a feeling of oppression in his chest as if he were about to cease breathing. In the midst of his panic at nothing—for that is precisely what it amounted to—he started at a feverish pace for the club and arrived there dripping. An attendant carried his satchel to the gymnasium, where he stripped and began the exercise that he had neglected, too often of late. His disorder, as he walked upon the floor, became more acute. He felt at the moment no definite physical pain or weakness, but was firmly convinced that in five minutes, at most, he would drop dead. He did not desire to avoid such a result, but being thoroughly confident that it was inevitable, became vexed and annoyed at the delay. He stood for a moment, with limbs tense and breath held hard, watching the swift heart-beats beneath his thin exercising shirt; and then, in a storm of impatience or fear, climbed the iron stairs to the gallery and made three circuits of the running track at top speed. The performance, if it allayed his immediate expectations of death, took no effect on his mental unrest. Other forms of exercise were equally lacking in efficacy. He punched the bag, savagely, like a professional, swung weights and clubs and hurled the medicine ball to the skylight, all by way of demonstrating to himself that his body was sound, if his wits were askew. For three or four brief minutes after his cold shower and plunge, there came a slight relaxation of the strain—the stimulation that follows naturally upon physical exertion and the contact with cold water. The subsequent relapse into despondency was even more violent. It was exasperating to look into the mirrors that surrounded him and realize that a man in apparently robust physical condition could be afflicted with so astounding a deficiency of nervous balance. As he dressed, he began once more to tremble and perspire. He looked from

ıe high windows of the club building into the street and ondered idly if it were too far to leap and the next instant : was beset by an insane fear that he would lose control of imself, and make the attempt—the descent to the street as close to forty feet!—and in sheer disgust and dismay : fled to the elevator. He sought breakfast at another of s clubs—this time in Fifth Avenue—only to find that the diculous and amazing dread that possessed him increased intensity every five minutes.

In his mail he found, as custom had taught him he would ıd, two heavy letters addressed in the hand of Agnes Plum aunt. That lady had a way of saying in writing things ıe had forgotten to utter verbally, and it frequently hap-:ned that her letters to Gaunt were written while he was :tually on the Island and came to New York with him on e same train. They were seldom important and not al-ays coherent; so, after his customary fashion, the recipient ɔcketed them for perusal at a time when he should be pre-ıred for serious matters.

The attendant who presently brought him strawberries ıd chocolate was a mild-faced old darky, and Gaunt no-:ed, with a relief that passed his own understanding, that the man's manner of greeting him there was neither sur-·ise nor concern. His maddening thoughts, then, were not :flected in his face. And yet, with every mouthful that he e, and during the moments in which he vainly endeavored ı concentrate his thoughts on the morning paper, his brain as racing through a wilderness of absurd reflection and ɔnjecture. What possible charm, he wondered, could life ɔld for this old black menial, who at the very limit could ırdy hope for ten years more of it? And yet here he was, iding about noiselessly and looking with tranquil eyes for chance to be of service to his betters. He recalled that her old nigger of a different type, lurching along in rags rough a Florida pine swamp, bawling salutations to his :aker in joy at the very breath he was permitted to draw. ah! The newspaper, with its flamboyant headlines and its

catalogue of horrors, vexed and disheartened him. The chief idea that it brought to his dazed senses was that of wonder that people could take the trouble to dispute, to work, to suffer, to quarrel, as this daily epitome of the world's doings told, when the time was so short—so short! He read of men forming giant commercial monopolies, planning political surprises, projecting wildcat schemes of exploration and finance. The idea of the brain-exertion such operations must entail afflicted him with a sense of actual fright. Suppose he should ever be called upon to undertake anything of the kind? Why, he would run from it a thousand miles! He saw other men about him reading newspapers, contentedly, and with evidence of interest and enjoyment, and watched them with bitterness and envy in his soul. There was a man nearly twice his age, a retired naval officer, cheery and spry, sprucely groomed, with a carnation in his coat and his mouth full of buttered toast. An old chap, on the verge, as it seemed, of the end of all things, and yet thoroughly and exasperatingly at peace with himself and all his prospects. As he passed him, the old fellow did not even look up, and Gaunt marked, with increased envy, the easy, dignified pose, and the turn of the well-kept hands. He had left his own breakfast practically untasted, and went out of the club feeling more nervous than ever and wholly unrefreshed.

He was experiencing, though he did not know it, the first consciousness of supreme and all-pervading ennui that comes to men whose lives, up to the age of thirty-odd, have been selfishly or unprofitably spent. The absence of a motive for existence, the lack of any definite or worthy ambition involved in its continuance, were conditions beating themselves remorselessly into his brain. The brain, deprived for the first time in years of the cheering force of a stimulant, refused to receive any save the most dismal of impressions. To the victim, pacing uncertainly down the street in the sunlight, the world seemed a weary and hopeless place, and he fell to pitying the cheerful people he

passed, who seemed to find so much to admire in it. He recalled, with amazement, the elation that had moved him as he had passed over this same pavement one bright morning in autumn nearly three years before. What a world then, and what a world now! He had drifted along in an atmosphere of foolish dreaming and this was the awakening. He remembered his boyish enthusiasm, his amusing vanity in his achievements and appearance. The memory shocked him. Such sentiments appeared to him now as almost irreligious. Here on the corner was the same flower-girl from whom he had bought his violets on that autumn morning. She looked older and taller, but she had the same bright face and in her eyes was the same earnest yet demure appeal. She did not remember him, of course, and she looked in surprise after the gloomy-visaged, rather stout young man who answered her appeal with a coin and strode on, without waiting for the flowers of which it was the price.

Whirling into the Avenue from Thirty-third Street, past the Waldorf, came a high cart, with brave red wheels, driven tandem. Seated therein, her round face aglow with health and pleasure, was Miss Effie Trenton, who, for some reason that nobody tried to explain, had not been invited to contribute her charm to the array of fluttering girlhood at the Island this summer. She smiled so brightly and mischievously upon Gaunt that the youth at her side, who had a vacuous face and a grotesque loose drab driving-coat, looked ill-natured and cut his leader smartly over the flanks with his long lash. The smile brought to the pedestrian's odd mixture of other moods one of a distinctly homicidal tendency—one which lasted him for eight blocks and increased rather than diminished in fervor as he passed the Brunswick.

Sensations as novel as they were poignant awaited him on his arrival at the office. With the act of seating himself at his desk and seeing the pile of letters and manuscript upon it, he was beset by such a revulsion, by so horrible a loathing of the work before him, that his very stomach rebelled. He secured, however, a thick letter from Agnes Plum Gaunt

and placed it, with many misgivings, with the others that had reached him at his club. His hands shook and the lines on the papers danced ridiculously before his eyes. The clack of a typewriter in the outer office sounded like the whanging of stones in a quarry. He could not sit still. He rose and paced the floor; then started, suddenly, to leave the office, but paused on remembering that there was absolutely nothing he could do on reaching the street, and that his discomfort would probably augment in its atmosphere. He looked out of the window into the Square and noted, with a new envy, the benches full of homeless idlers without a care. He was conscious of a bitter craving, not for drink itself, but for the relief of mind he was sure it would bring him. If his resolution wavered, however, it was only for a moment, for Major Plum came in and he recalled the manner of its making.

How he contrived to get through this day, he could never afterwards comprehend, and the amount of work he managed to accomplish before sunset did not materially affect the destinies of that week's issue of *The Fang*. It was a relief when the Editor (formerly the Literary Reviewer, you will remember) lounged in—an event that transpired toward noon and brought grieved looks but no spoken remonstrance from the Major. Captain Clapham, too, whose absence from the Island was due solely, poor fellow, to his lack of means of transportation thither, pushed his shining cranium through the door, in the old familiar way, in time to be invited to luncheon. The three adjourned to "Del's" together about one, where the editor guffawed mightily and the Captain nearly collapsed with astonishment at their comrade's refusal to be convivial. "Miracles happen every day, old chap," consoled the Captain waggishly, "I can stawnd it in your kyse, but if the Majaw follows your exawmple, I know I shall fynt." So he and the Editor emptied the Rhine wine bottle between them, and no more was said.

The chief evidence of the affection existing between

Major Plum and his son-in-law was found in the care with which they avoided each other, after office hours, when in town. With the object of their dual solicitude safe in her mountain home, they could afford this courteous and mutual consideration for each other's feelings. True, the Major had a bluff way of inquiring, with much apparent concern, if Gaunt had his Monday evening agreeably provided for, but he would have been fearfully embarrassed if the young man had evinced any desire to remain in his company. Custom had taught him, however, not to fear this, so that the inquiry could be repeated, with safety and sincerity, on every Monday evening throughout the summer. Still, after this rather distressing day, the assistant editor, in his remarkable mood, would have been glad of almost any company. He had tried without success to capture one friend after another, over the telephone, and had about resigned himself to the fate of dining alone when the sight of a tall, slim figure passing into the Hoffman House arrested his attention. He pursued it, and experienced something like a thrill of joy on finding it to be that of his friend Romney. The latter was attired with his usual elegance, in a suit of steel gray, but his face was no more cheerful than Gaunt's. He seemed to have undergone a shock of some sort.

"What is it, Bob?" asked his friend, after they had greeted each other warmly, as old friends will, "trouble of some kind?"

By this time they were in the café. "Read this," said Romney, huskily, and turned to order some champagne.

It was a cablegram from Paris, and it contained the news, worded with pitiless brevity, that "Harry" had died that morning.

"What!" cried Gaunt, trembling, as he handed back the slip of paper, "you don't mean it's *our* Harry?"

"Yes, I do," declared the other, with a miserable effort at jauntiness, "and I drink to the finest boy that ever lived—a

thoroughbred if ever there was one!" He drained his glass, pushing another toward Gaunt. The latter excused himself without ostentation, and asked softly, "What was it?"

"Appendicitis," replied the dead man's friend, adding, with bitterness, "and that means, in plain English, 'license to some surgeon to commit murder.' How many victims survive that hideous operation, do you think? God! I wish I had my hands on the beasts that killed him!" The bass voice choked as the speaker flicked his eyes with his handkerchief.

"Come," said Gaunt, who felt faint and ill with the shock, which he could have borne with perfect equipoise a week before, "let us walk down to the Martin and have dinner there. We can talk it over then."

Of the two men, any one would have adjudged him the more calm. As a matter of fact every nerve in his body was unstrung and jangling. Here, he reflected, was Death again—Death aggressive, Death piratical, Death triumphant, snatching away a dear lad in the full flush of health and youth, his own junior by fully half-a-dozen years. He recalled Haverstraw's sunny and buoyant temperament, his ardent friendships, his persistent generosity, his lively wit. He recalled their last riotous frolic down the Midway together and marveled at the lightning flight of the years. He could not understand, even now, why the thought of Death should fill him with such utter and unspeakable horror; because heretofore he had regarded it, as most men do, with indifference, as the just finale, or debt, that millions were meeting and paying every day. Still, here was his own friend, a mere boy, perishing like a flower, or a breath of air, whilst he!—— He looked askance at Romney as they crossed Twenty-third Street and kept on down the Avenue. His friend's grief was the profound, self-contained grief of the man-of-the-world, a grief all sincerity and depth, with no atom of thought of self in it. Then he thought of his own terror, and recognizing it accurately as the most

pitiable cowardice, scarcely knew whether he was tempted most to laugh or to sneer.

The warmth of the day had abated, and the slow walk down the Avenue in the early evening was refreshing. At Fourteenth Street they overtook George Scott, going in their direction. They easily persuaded him to accompany them, though Gaunt looked carefully up and down the street in search of the usual companion-piece to this apparition.

The three men dined together comfortably enough. Under the stimulus of the admirable menu and the company of his friends, some of the blackness of Gaunt's humor disappeared, though that grim spectre of Death came to him at intervals, perking and prancing along the walls, over the heads of the gay company, or grimacing at him across the rim of his glass of Apollinaris. His refusal of wine brought him the expected good-natured gibes. Romney, however, was inclined to applaud. "Good for you, Eustace," he condescended to say, "I often wonder how you and I have stood the pace so well. It was too much for poor Harry, you see—ah no! Those doctors killed him, the beasts! When I go to Congress I'm going to make the operation for appendicitis punishable by hanging."

"It's a good thing for some people to stop drinking," said Scott, who, having enjoyed the best of dinners, was inclined to feel amiable toward all creation. "Look presently in the direction I am looking, and see if I am not right. The man," he continued, in a lower voice, "is an actor in one of my companies. I need not tell you his wife is an angel, because any one can see that by looking at her."

In those days the Martin was one of the most famous dining-places in New York. The large room was crowded with smartly groomed men and women in dainty summer toilettes, not a few of whom were slyly observing the little tragedy to which the theatrical manager had called the attention of his two companions.

At one of the smaller side-tables sat three persons, a man,

a woman and a little boy. The man was large of frame, well dressed and handsome after a rather coarse type. The child was a manly little fellow, in a neat sailor suit that revealed a pair of sturdy legs, bare and brown, hanging over the rungs of his chair. He had a gentle face, crowned by yellow hair, and a pair of great eyes, full of wonder. His mother had a girlish figure and a sensitive mouth. She fitted Scott's definition.

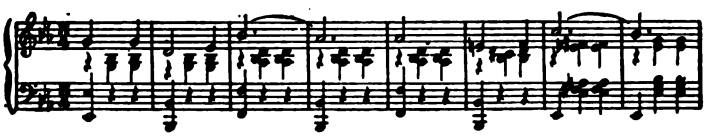
The parents had disagreed and the reason was not far to seek. It was not so much that the man had been drinking more than was good for him, as his evident determination to leave her, that was causing his wife's distress. She was looking at him with earnestness and affection, and as often as he made a movement toward rising, she laid a small hand appealingly on his sleeve. Each time she did so he spoke to her less agreeably and finally, with an impatient shrug of the shoulders, slipped some money under her plate for the waiter, and hurried out.

He had not even glanced a good-by at the child, and it was the child's face that now attracted and fascinated Eustace Gaunt. The great eyes were opened wide, in an effort to grasp a situation too complex for his infantile mind. In the look he sent after his father there were love and regret, and also grief—the vague, pathetic grief of a nature that sees and recognizes a trouble it cannot hope to understand or amend. His mother looked steadily at the tablecloth, and her fingers trembled as they played absently with some silverware.

The tableau, to one who understood it, was pregnant with pathos. For Gaunt it perhaps had a deeper significance than for the two men that sat with him. It carried him swiftly and unerringly back to a day far distant, when he himself had been an actor in a precisely similar scene. It was on one of the very rare occasions when some sharp words had passed between himself and Elaine, and he had left her in anger, standing in the street near their house. Their little boy had stood by, listening, and as his father

left, the expression in his face was the precise expression of this New York child, seen here and now, in this restaurant—an expression of piteous sorrow and voiceless expostulation, of silent helplessness and appeal. And that was years ago. And to-night—

So sharply had the sight struck home that the man stepped instantly into another world—a sad gray world of Memory and Remorse. He forgot for a moment the grewsome mental turbulence of the day, and saw other visions. The lights and colors danced and swam. The orchestra was in reality playing the "Evening Star" song from "Tannhauser," but to this fanciful brain it seemed to be crooning the fragment of a waltz:—



and the Dreamer was not a whit surprised to hear George Scott softly breathe, "My God!" He knew what had happened without being told.

Imogen Leal wore a white dress with a knot of violets at her throat. She appeared younger than she did in World's Fair days, and her sister, who was with her, just as impish and insouciant. Their escorts, who looked unimportant, seated them acceptably, and Gaunt was pleased, when he exchanged bows with the ladies presently, to find that he felt less embarrassed than they looked.

He turned, from a brief and decorous survey of the lady in white, with the violets, to look at the yellow-haired little boy. The sturdy bare legs had straightened, and the youngster, standing on the rung of his chair, was leaning across the table to caress his mother's jeweled hand with his own, in a comforting fashion and a knightly. She was smiling at him, but her offspring's face was full of gravity and concern even yet; for her eyes had tears in them, and he saw.

The child himself turned suddenly, and feeling Gaunt's eyes upon him, gave him stare for stare. The grieved look was still in his face and the man turned away:—turned, to throw one more glance upon the lady in white, with the violets, and then, with Memory stabbing and thrashing, to again seek the beautiful child's gaze—fascinated.

He recalled a passage in the scriptures:

> Whosoever shall offend one of these little ones, it were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck and he were cast into the depths of the sea.

And he knew now why he was afraid to die.

CHAPTER XXXV

CONCERNING SYMPTOMS

"And for how long," asked the doctor, smiling, "have you been afflicted in this peculiar way?"

"Ever since August," was his patient's reply, "that makes nearly four months. It seems to me about time that I was becoming rational."

"I think so, too. And yet you look well enough. I cannot see anything wrong with you, outwardly."

"No, that's perfectly true," acquiesced Gaunt. "The gymnasium has done that for me. I am as strong as a horse and I sleep well. That is what makes my mental condition seem so odd. After the exemplary life I have been leading for these months"—he sneered slightly—"why should I suffer from this dire melancholia? Is it the penalty I must pay for past trangressions?"

"I'm afraid it is."

"But why? Of course, I have been indiscreet in a way, but my indulgences, if they must have so harsh a name, have been trifling compared with those of other men that

I know, and they have all been compressed into two or three years. Besides, the occasions upon which I have drunk to actual excess I can count on my fingers. Why should my penalty be so severe—and so interminable?"

"Ah, there you go," smiled the man of medicine and wisdom, "like so many others. You fancy it is only drunkards that injure themselves by drinking. Why, man, your hilarious drunkard is a paragon of wisdom, compared with some men I know. I mean your drunkard who gets inordinately drunk one day and then stops drinking altogether for a month. It is your steady tippler, who drinks so much every day, just to keep comfortable, and who was perhaps never really drunk in all his life, who will some day go to pieces."

"Then you think all drinking is bad?"

"My dear fellow, no! Do I look like a fanatic? A little wine for your stomach's sake. Ah, what wisdom in that speech! A little good wine, taken rationally, never hurt anybody and never will. It's the great American distillery that—pardon me!—makes business for us."

"You have not yet told me the cause of my trouble, nor what I must do for it."

"What are the symptoms to which you most object?"

"I don't object to them. That would do no good. But I acknowledge they mystify me. I am curious to know why I, a man, as you say, in thoroughly sound physical condition, should walk the streets every day for four months in the firm conviction that each step I take is to be the last. Why, doctor, it is actually amusing. When I am downtown I scrutinize the flagstones, in search of a nice clean one to drop dead on. When I walk home of an evening, I find myself insensibly counting the undertakers' shops along the boulevard. I have been doing this, as I tell you, for months. You will oblige me greatly by telling me whether I am sane or crazy."

The doctor wheeled suddenly in his chair. "Do you wish to die?" he asked abruptly.

"By no means," was the prompt response. "On the contrary, I was never so anxious to live. That reminds me of another of my 'symptoms,' as you call them—the dread that I may commit suicide—a coarse act in any case, and one that I heartily despise in those guilty of it. I haven't the slightest desire or tendency that way, mind you, but I can't stand and wait for an elevated train without wondering if something will impel me to pitch myself under the engine, or cross a ferry without calculating the chances of my heaving myself overboard. Don't want to die, either, you understand, but afraid I may without wanting to. That's my case."

The doctor laughed. "Very uncomfortable, too," he said, consolingly. "It's what in most instances we would call nervous prostration, but you look too healthy for that. Now doesn't it strike you as odd that a strapping fellow like you, clean and clear-eyed, and attired like a fashion-plate, should be sitting here telling me such confounded balderdash as that?"

"It does," confessed Gaunt, contritely. "It's worse than odd; it's childish. But I assure you I do not come here in a childish or whining spirit. I told you I was curious, not afraid. I simply say to you that I am tired of finding myself in this humiliating condition; I want you to tell me its cause, and to cure me of it if you can, and if you can do neither, to say so."

"You ought not to talk to your family doctor that way, my boy. Now, listen. I am entirely familiar with the symptoms that you describe, and so is every doctor that is worth his salt in the land. I will tell you what they mean. Primarily, of course, they are due to the long indulgence in stimulants, and the sudden stopping of that indulgence. The stopping affects the entire system and results in the symptoms you describe. They are the symptoms that make it impossible for nine men out of ten to stop drinking when they desire to do so."

"Why?"

"Because they can't endure the misery of them."

"You said 'primarily.' To what are they due secondarily?"

"Generally," answered the doctor, with a close look at his caller, "to a long and hard mental strain of some kind. The two together will produce a very stubborn case of nervous prostration indeed."

"Then as you say I have not nervous prostration, my case simply amounts to one of driveling imbecility. Is that it?"

"Scarcely. You must be very patient. You are doing very well indeed. If you had ever been a really hard case, you could not have done as well. Just think of it: you might have had to take a 'cure.'"

"A cure? I don't understand. Oh, you mean a Keeley 'cure,' or something like that. Pardon, doctor—I don't think it is possible to reform drunkenness by advertising it. Besides, most of the 'cured' men that I know bark, even now, when they see water. No. I think I prefer my horrors."

"Well," agreed the doctor, "it's all right. You can stand 'em—if you've got the nerve. You'll come out all right, but you may suffer in the way you describe for a long time."

"Which means, I presume," observed Gaunt, mildly, as he drew on his gloves, "that you can't do one damned thing for me. Why don't you admit it, doctor?"

"I can give you some medicine that—"

"Thanks, no. I have been less miserable since I pitched your 'stomach medicine,' as you called it, into the street. You told me it was a sedative, you know, and I tried a dose of it on one of the Major's cats. I have since been ashamed to look the animal in the face. So I must go on suffering, must I?"

"Gaunt," said the physician kindly, noting his friend and patient's hopeless look, "let me ask you something: Have you anything on your mind?"

The young man seemed interested. "Proceed," he said simply.

"Frankly," insisted the older one, "are you entirely happy in your business and domestic affairs, or is there some secret trouble weighing on you mentally? Because, if there is—"

"Continue, doctor. If there is?"

"In that case, my boy"—a hand was placed, in fatherly fashion, on the "boy's" (?) shoulder—"in that case, rid yourself of it, or I won't answer for the consequences, either to your health or your mind. Tell me," urged the doctor, turning his patient half round, so the light would fall on his face, "are you happy—contented—in the ordinary sense?"

Gaunt's face turned a shade paler. "Surely," he laughed, "in the ordinary sense," and went out. His medical adviser looked after him, not without approval. He was the family physician, and admired artistic lying.

CHAPTER XXXVI

THE COMMODORE, SOME REFLECTIONS, AND THE OPERA

The companionship of "Commodore" Cortlandt Ellis was a blessing and a boon to at least one of his fellow-beings that winter. The veteran for some reason or another had spruced up a little. He did some work at intervals, and showed himself occasionally at his clubs. Between himself and Gaunt there had always existed a close sympathy, and this was heightened, possibly, by the feeling of interest, almost of reverence, with which the older man regarded the younger's experiment of total abstinence. The two were together a good deal, and the sentiment with which each viewed the other's habits contained a separate lesson and inspiration. In Gaunt the Commodore saw, or thought he saw, a fine subject for an emulation he by no means meant to attempt; in the Commodore Gaunt found the eloquent warning (if he had needed it) of an incessant Awful Example. Thus the association was mutually beneficial.

The two walked up town together frequently, after the day's work, and upon evenings when it seemed certain that he and the Major's daughter were doomed to dine alone—a rare event—Gaunt usually invited the Commodore. They made stops by the way—stops that served the double purpose of cheering the Commodore and increasing his loquacity. This guest, by the way, was well liked by Agnes Gaunt—a circumstance for which Eustace Gaunt was grateful. His appetite was a compliment to his hostess and his skill as a raconteur the frequent preventive of embarrassment. In the course of those long walks (taken, sometimes, with the temperature at zero and the snow flying in clouds—the Commodore loved rugged weather as well as he loved rugged men!) the younger of the two learned much. He studied a nature weak enough in some elements but strong as steel in the firmest and most admirable principles of manhood. He knew the old yachtsman's history well, though the latter never spoke of it, and he had an esteem for the indomitable spirit that would not yield. So the sympathy between them grew. Once in a while Captain Clapham was invited to their conclaves and their dinners, but never to their walks. The Captain, alas! was too puffy for that.

Either of the two comrades, if appealed to, would have claimed to be receiving the lion's share of the advantage from the alliance. True, the benefits Gaunt was able to bestow upon the Commodore were of a material nature, the old salt never having mastered the science of economy; but he received compensation that he regarded as immeasurable. The Commodore, he knew, was a friend that could be trusted. Such friends are rare enough at all times. In emergencies they are invaluable.

His plight, if so it might be termed, was one wholly of sentiment, and it gave him no peace. He was haunted, tirelessly and unremittingly, by the revelation of his own folly—the revelation made to him at night, in a restaurant, by the simple spectacle of a little child's grief. In these short months, looking at Life through the naked lens of reason,

he had seen in all its bitter reality the wreck of it that he had made. The impression, once formed, could not be effaced, and it forced him to lead two lives.

The life of Mockery and the life of Memory. The first, when in the company of others; the second, when alone.

In his house, or when at his work in *The Fang* office, he wore his mask of concealment well. He was able to flatter himself that no member of Major Plum's family, and certainly none of his friends, had detected any malady, mental or physical, from which he might be suffering. The Major was in the habit of coming to the house for his breakfasts, and it was not necessary to witness, however deeply one might deplore, his diurnal devastation of chops. The matter of dinners was different. The Major procured champagne on advertising contracts and sent it to his daughter in wagon-loads—an inconsiderate practice in any man whose son-in-law does not drink. To the dinners came all the Major's friends—the army veterans and the array of fluttering girlhood in sections. A merry crew and cheerful, always; and Gaunt, as host, attacked his duty faithfully—with that quaint and unconquerable Spectre ever and always staring him in the face. That was part of the Mockery. And at such seasons the host found a refuge and a friend in the Commodore, whom nobody missed, stowed away in a corner, with his bottle. And afterwards, maybe, a long tramp of the twain in the night air up the Riverside Drive, where the Hudson gleamed like a lady's white dress, in its ruching of snow and ice.

The long days at the office yielded their diversion in the way of work—hard, persistent labor, done for no purpose save that of forgetfulness, and despised with every breath the worker drew. Here the mask of indifference or cheerfulness was more easily worn; for it was comforting to know that the Major, at least, was profiting. There came there, too, at times, men and women of value and intellect, with whom it was a charm to converse. Teddy Lighthouse dropped in on accidental afternoons on his way uptown for

a chat and some billiards, and those were afternoons of brightness. And on days when there was no brightness, the Mockery seemed deeper; and on such days, the faithful Commodore and his brave tales and his ceaseless eye-blinking were welcome indeed.

So much for the Life of Mockery. The Life of Memory was sterner yet. In his hours of solitude the awakened Dreamer lived his years of requital. He had learned the impossibility of successfully slighting the imperative mandates of Nature and of Conscience; and, instead of waning, the bitterness of the realization quickened and grew. He walked the streets in the day and the night a prey to reflections that tormented and stung. Humiliating and disconcerting events in his present domestic life were rendered the more unendurable because of his knowledge that any experience of the kind that he might encounter would be deserved. He carried in his heart constantly, in every waking moment, that one drear thought of a little child offended. From the day of his awakening he had yearned, with all the passion of his being, to see his son, and his soul was wrung with the anguish of the thought that he had no right. Added to this was the shame of feeling himself now to be, in a sense, a double traitor. Moulding his life as he had done, what right had he to hunger for a son lost to him by his own deliberate act? The justice of the retribution enhanced its bitterness. Sometimes, riding in street cars or trains, he saw a child that he fancied might resemble his own, and felt tempted, if the parents seemed poor, to make friends with them, and give them money. After their long sleep, his memory was vivid, his perceptions acute. He recalled his son in a thousand ways—his manner of speech, his dress, the trivial incidents of his babyhood. He looked into the faces of strange people and wondered if they recognized him as the forsaken fool he felt. And with it all would come the persistent thought—"it is not for a day, nor a year, nor for ten years, but *forever*, that he is lost to you." Bitterer even than that sense of loss was the knowledge

that atonement was denied him. The son—the part of himself that he had given to the world—must grow to manhood thinking of his father—thus and so. There was no escape from it—none.

He found little distraction in his clubs. The company one finds at one's clubs is not always preferable to solitude; and Gaunt's occupation, when visiting any of the three to which he belonged, consisted chiefly in determining in just what proportion he preferred the other two. In this feeling he was not unreasonable. The atmosphere of a New York club of the right sort is rather trying to nervous people—the respectability is so sepulchral and the sight of so many men, all so correctly accoutred and behaved, so very monotonous. In his athletic exercises he persisted regularly because they afforded him a mental diversion he could find in no other way. His friend the Commodore frequently accompanied him to the gymnasium. He, wise man, knew by experience the value of muscular exertion as an antidote to melancholy, and therefore encouraged the good work.

There was one hour of reflection, or brooding, which beset the victim regularly, and which, being unbrightened by any possibility of the Commodore's appearance, he was compelled to face alone. After the ceremony of putting the paper to press every week—a long day supplemented by three-quarters of a night of rather exhausting labor—the staff of *The Fang*, headed by Major Plum, usually went to supper at some convenient resort in Broadway. Upon this repast no light ever shone. Each man, his faculties more or less benumbed by the long strain of brain exertion, confined himself strictly to the business in hand, even the Major being too busy with his reflections upon the results of some of his paragraphs to converse, or even to consume chops. When the party separated on the sidewalk, morosely, in the night, the impression left upon the mind of Gaunt was that of a gang of small-calibre conspirators, who, having laid their dynamite, were departing stealthily to their holes—the knowledge of his own complicity in the plot

bringing with it no comfort, you may be sure. Journeying homeward alone in a so-called "owl-car," with a load of chance roysterers for company, he had an opportunity to consider the myriads of people that had been made uncomfortable by *The Fang* since he had formed a connection with it. He thought of scandals unearthed, of reputations punctured, of praiseworthy projects relentlessly ridiculed and ruthlessly battered down. He placed the properly criminal estimate upon his own deliberate enlistment under this banner of literary vandalism and recognized too late his prostitution of whatever slender talents and ambitions he possessed. In that hour every remnant of the lightheartedness and effervescence that had marked his youth seemed swept away and even his armor of cynicism was penetrated and smashed by his recognition of himself as one of an Ishmaelitish crew, feared and hated of men. His mind could seek no other channel. He would have changed places with the motorman or a newsboy. It was a passenger with an old man's face that alighted from the car at the end of the journey. This was the whirlwind; and it was bitter in the reaping.

Yet there was one avenue of escape—one sweet harbor of refuge—the Opera. The one-thousandth resignation of Snare, the Musical Critic, had been celebrated by its acceptance, and the Major had entrusted his son-in-law with the work. The regular attendance through the season at the glorious temple in Broadway had brought the latter a relaxation unspeakable, besides heightening his worship of Art, in this, its most exquisite form. He usually went to the opera alone. Agnes Gaunt disliked music and the Major could not go because he could not get into one seat. So on certain nights the Assistant Editor of *The Fang* had his feasts—the feasts of melody and of beauty that he loved, and that brought him the luxury of an approach to actual rest. Here he could not be interrupted, and here, for a season, he lived his pauper dreams; for to those who worship her in the right way, this Goddess of Music is very

kind and gives luxuries of imagining that may be reached at no other shrine. Visions and dreams—dreams and visions! And most beautiful of all, maybe, is—the Invisible Presence.

The Invisible Presence at the Opera:—ah, digress with me a moment and see if you have never felt its power.

It steals from the haze of harmonies vaguely, like the memory of an interrupted bliss, and backward and forward it floats, dreamily and gently, settling itself finally upon the brain, with a positiveness that declines to be shaken. It is, perhaps, the other half of the soul—the sleeping half, which, born of the melody, has crept into the chaos of the Actual, in order to render dreamland the more beautiful by contrast. And thus the Ghost—the sweet white Ghost that, being invisible to the eye and photographed only on the canvas of thought, cannot possibly be of this world—parades before you with placid persistence and adds to a charm that the exquisite art of many minstrels has already rendered perfect. The identity of the opera itself is not of grave consequence, for it is in the setting of the musical feast, as well as in the music itself, that the Presence finds its inspiration and its power to chain and thrall. The atmosphere of luxury, the shimmer of laces and glitter of gems, the enervating lure of delicate scents—all these things tend to banish materialism for the moment and give fancy rein; and it is then that the spell of the Presence is felt. And yet the music has much to do with it also; and it should, after all, be dear, familiar music—music that has played a part, maybe, in other scenes and other times, and welded Memory to to-day in bonds that may not be lightly severed. Whether Juliet's love-sighs or Marguerite's passion or Elsa's pleading—what matter? The strains are equally tender and dear, and they soar into the atmosphere of jewels and flesh-tints and lace; and over them always hovers the Presence, vaguely, like the memory of an interrupted bliss.

To be quite plain, what is the Presence?

It is—*one's Holiest Thought.*

In most lives, no matter how commonplace, there is some one dream or fancy that is resolutely put aside in the every-day hurry-scurry for existence, but which persists in stealing into the heart in moments of peace or of calm enjoyment in a manner there is no resisting. Some secret desire, or even a grief, sweet because shunned in times of rational reflection and prosaic purpose. It is, let us say, a thought dear beyond expression because the desire that goes with it is one utterly impossible of attainment. The desire may be of the future or of the past, and it is, of course, a desire that has its center or fountain-head in a human being whose happiness is desired before one's own. The influence then, of this world of music upon natures susceptible to its power, and burdened with such a thought, is mighty and far-reaching. Watch the faces of the men and women about you when the house hangs breathless upon the moving lips of this Juliet with the rivulet of pearls laughing limpidly from her throat. The expression may be different, but with each and every one of them the thought is one and the same. Such music as this, with its environment of luxury and ease, brings to each mind that its sweetness smites the one thought that is dearest before all else in life. This is why, as you peer about you, idly marveling at the ache in your own throat, you find yourself confronted with seriously drawn mouths and moistened eyes. It is because each person in your neighborhood has been carried by the magic spell of harmony into his own particular Garden of Dreams and is for the moment lost there, happily, because beyond possibility of rescue. It is because each man and each woman who happens to be possessed of a soul is brought face to face for the moment with the Presence—the Invisible Presence most near and dear, whether that of a person or a mere desire. It may be any Presence—mind you. It may be a Presence cozened from the memory of a grave beyond seas or one that speaks from the quiet eyes of a little child. But whatever form it may take, it is the one sacred and paramount Presence of your life, and it has stolen upon you

here, unawares, simply because music is the profoundest memory-stirrer known.

Shall I tell what the Invisible Presence at the Opera does for me? The temperature of the house, let us say, is perfect. There are neither heat-waves to irritate the chest nor draughts to chill one's marrow. On every side there is a harmonious grouping of figures and of tints. Then—then comes the hush. There is a cessation of whispering—the bending forward of delicate necks. It is one of the "situations" of the opera. There is a crooning of the horns, a lilt of the complaining violins. Then rises the Voice—that matchless gift of God, sent down for the betterment of an undeserving race—and with the strain, the sweeter because familiar and anticipated, the Invisible Presence steals upon me, noiseless and insistent, following the singer note for note, and momentarily glorifying the sameness of to-night with all the sweetness of a well-remembered yesterday. The song itself is a glory and delight and with the added spell of the Presence it accomplishes miracles of creation and effacement. It gives to Life the zest of newer and dearer dreams, and it blots from it all that ever existed of the harsh, or mean, or little, or impure. It destroys time; it restores youth. It paints the dead white wall of indifference into a charming landscape and lends a beauty even to grief. It leads me through fairy castles of opal and glass and acquaints me with paths through tangled brakes of alder and fern where saucy linnets are gossiping and squirrels playing sentinel with beady eyes. Restore youth, did I say? Pooh! Under this gracious influence I am back in my twenties again, mocking at man, beast and the devil, and laughing at life as the veriest joke in the calendar. It is a season of exquisite dreaming, and in the midst of it I can hear the voice of the Presence, saying in a whisper so heavenly soft it disturbeth the singer on the stage not a whit: "'Tis a sad, sad world, old dunce. But there are a few bright spots in it, believe me, and—I am one of them!" And as I turn to murmur a reverential "Amen," the Invis-

ible Presence has fled; for the familiar song is done, and the spell departed, and the women near by are whispering to one another again—most likely of their clothes.

And so—

This was the tenor of one vagrant's dreaming when a hand was placed on his shoulder, and a voice he knew whispered softly, "wake up."

A miracle! It was the Commodore, attired *de rigeur* and looking every inch an aristocrat, albeit a trifle worn. Gaunt concealed his amazement, and motioned to the vacant seat at his side. "No," demurred his friend, blinking very rapidly at the lights, "the curtain's down. Let's go and prowl in the lobby."

In the lobby there was the usual crush. "Surprised, aren't you?" queried the Commodore, fondling his opera hat with the ostentatious affection of one long estranged from such delights. "I like to come here once in a great while—to look at the mob."

"*The mob!*" exclaimed his companion, in horror.

"Yes," was the answer, delivered to the accompaniment of many blinks. "It's the same old mob and always will be. In one respect New York society is the most provincial in the world: it suffers constantly from the erroneous impression that it is exclusive. It's amusing to an old-timer."

"Explain, please," urged Gaunt. He was experiencing amusement on his own account in the looks of incredulity and amazement cast upon his friend by the smart people strolling, like themselves, in the corridor. Some of them bowed, in a doubtful way, at the Commodore, and others, after a swift glance, suddenly perceived interesting objects in other directions. It suggested a Charity Ball in Chicago years before.

"Well," snapped the old yachtsman, who, for his part, seemed to give himself little concern as to any feeling, or lack of it, displayed towards him, and troubled himself to bow to nobody, "the opera itself is a close corporation, I grant you. No outsider can gain possession of a grand tier

Captain's possession of a heart, but his h
the belt.

In the absences of the new editor, whic
Ellis and Gaunt spent a good many hou
office together, and it was in this way that t
ship found opportunities to strengthen and
young man was working hard—harder tha
worked in his life before. In addition to his
on the paper, he continued to produce novel
Plum's quarterly—rather weird efforts they
ciently execrable in moral tone to comman
and after the hour of uninterrupted labor tha
miraculous absence of din in the outer offic
was an easy matter to poke the Commodore
with a two-foot rule and induce him to conve

On the afternoon of this specimen day
office that had witnessed the Fluttering Tri
Major and the customary hari-kari of his
been a period of peace as unusual as it was
Major had remained away and the cats had s
had entered with a bludgeon in his hand
heart and no stenographer had bleated fo
teeth. Sweet quietude had reigned in th
nearly three hours, during which a full ch
added to a novel descriptive of life in C
Commodore had snored gently many time
the scale. It was almost time to start upto
left the office without the advent of some ci
tinctly diverting would have established a ne
was not to be.

The editor came in blithely. He had bee
book-shops and had a load of treasures u
He deposited them carefully on his desk
cigarette. Before the Commodore was fa
was a shuffling of uncertain feet beyond th
the Cynical Paragrapher entered, obliquel
violence.

"Into society, of course—into that wonderful circle that would never have been created and could not now exist without the assistance of the newspapers that advertise it. There are people in society now who would have been laughed out of it in my time. And why shouldn't they be? We're a Republic, are we not? and liberal? Any family or individual with money, patience and the ability to bear a few kicks can enter New York Society nowadays—provided the newspapers are willing."

"I am afraid, Commodore," sighed Gaunt, "that you don't look at the opera from the artistic side."

"I don't," was the prompt rejoinder, "I look upon it as an amusing show, in which the minority makes a spectacle for the majority; and that minority composed, mind you, of people who have in their heads no thought of art but only the modern and passionate desire to out-glorify their neighbors. Sorry, my boy, but I can't see the sentimental side of it."

"I won't try to convert you. The curtain will rise presently. Will you come? There's a vacant seat, you know."

"Couldn't endure sitting still," declared the Commodore, "see you afterwards, maybe." He was moving off when Gaunt saw him abruptly stop and look squarely into the face of a youth of twenty who was passing. The youth's clothes fitted him faultlessly. He was a typical New York youth, with clear-cut, high-bred features and an air of intolerance of all humanity. As he met the glance of Cortlandt Ellis, a shade of the palest possible pink came into his face, simultaneously with a look of annoyance. He passed on with a slight swagger, his hat under his arm and the tips of his gloved fingers in his trousers pockets. Between the two there had passed no sign of recognition.

As Gaunt took his seat for the third act of "Romeo and Juliet" he espied two people he knew, the sight of whom exercised upon him widely varying effects. To the left, quite the most exquisite figure in a row of brilliant, daintily nurtured women, sat Mrs. Teddy Lighthouse, "Sunbeam"

now, surely; for there was a very bedazzlement of diamonds in her dark hair, and her cheeks still glowed with a remnant of the summer's tan. Typical, she, of all that was good, and delicate, and desirable in Life. And on the right of the aisle, surrounded by the womenkind that supported him, "Jimmy"—"Jimmy" the paragrapher, dapper, debonair and florid, mirth on mouth and monocle in eye—"Jimmy," the dark privateer who sat here, forsooth, with Society, in the broad light, smiling, and—wrote of its frailties behind its back, for pay. Heavens, what a contrast!

Mrs. Teddy was glorious, but what with "Jimmy's" bravado and the Commodore's cynicism, "Juliet" seemed, after all, to be singing off the key.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE CONFESSION OF THE COMMODORE

The Commodore, two hours before, had been amazingly sober, and Gaunt, who had searched for him vainly in the Opera House lobbies at the end of the performance, was scarcely surprised to see that his step was now a little irregular. The old salt was turning eastward in Thirty-seventh Street, and he would have hailed him at once if his curiosity had not been excited by the bundles he was carrying. True, it was Christmas week, but he knew the Commodore had no friends. Besides, nobody carries home Christmas presents after the opera.

So he followed behind, in a spirit of idleness that was due, possibly, to his indisposition to go home. The idea of joking the Commodore was pleasing. It was an exhilarating night—bitterly cold, with a light snow falling. The Commodore, for all the exaggerated marine lilt in his gait, was making good time. Broadway, with its flaring lights, the

opera house, with its tangle of carriages, were soon left behind. The quarry, weighted as it was, crossed Fifth Avenue at a lope, and the huntsman came close after. The pathway across town was swift.

There was no object in the pursuit except that of running the old man to cover and making him talk for some hours. There was no period of the night at which the Commodore was not willing to do this, provided the audience were congenial, and lubricants handy; and Gaunt, who knew in a vague sort of way that he lived on the west side of town, had no fear of interrupting a scene of domesticity. The farther east his friend walked, the keener grew his curiosity. He kept within easy striking distance, as the racing reporters say, but not so close as to incur risk of detection. The chase came to an end in First Avenue. The Commodore turned south, making crescent tracks in the snow, and paused before a row of squalid flats within sight of the Thirty-fourth Street ferry. He entered a doorway, ascended a flight of stairs and disappeared as though the earth had eaten him.

Whereupon the pursuer, naturally, felt foolish. He debated within himself whether to retire discreetly or risk a rebuke for the impertinence of further pursuit. Courage and curiosity, combined with an abhorrence of solitude, decided it. He floundered up the stairs in the darkness. At the first landing the game was run to earth.

Through the half-open door, the light came from a single room. It was a mean room, but spotlessly clean. Before the intruder could gain a clear outline of its contents, a voice came at him—such a voice as one hears hurled down the slanting deck of a yacht, in a gale:

"What the blazes do you want here?"

The intruder's courage forsook him. It was the first time in his memory that he had seen the Commodore profoundly enraged.

There was a woman—a thin woman with a weary face—in

the room, and two children. The woman looked frightened. "Faith, sor," she pleaded, to the newcomer, "don't make the good gintleman mad."

"The good gintleman!" Gaunt breathed again. Thank heaven, then, this was no family affair. "You're not hospitable, you old ruffian," he informed his friend; "why don't you invite me in?"

"Well, you can come in, since you're here," growled the Commodore. For some reason he was looking ashamed. To hide his embarrassment, he took the taller child, a sparsely clad girl of ten, on his knee and began to gently pinch her ears.

The woman, with much bustling and with many fervent ejaculations to her Maker, was unwrapping the Commodore's packages. .They disclosed a fat turkey, a mess of beef and sausages, potatoes, celery—the makings, in short, of a very wholesome Christmas dinner. Before Gaunt could ask any questions, a peevish voice came from a cot, hitherto unobserved, in a corner. It framed a quavering inquiry as to whether the owner was to receive any whiskey.

"Whiskey? Whiskey!" blustered the Commodore, blinking rapidly, "I declare I'd forgotten." He was off down the stairs like a shot, and they saw him, through the window, cross the street and invade the saloon opposite. The thin woman sat down and caterwauled, exultantly, "Hivven sint him! Hivvin sint him!"

"How did you happen to know this gentleman, madam?" asked Gaunt gently. It was treacherous to spy, but his amazement compelled it.

"Sure," was the ready answer, "Oi don't know him from the son av Moses, Oi don't, nor poor Tom there"—a jerk of her thumb over her shoulder at the emaciated figure on the cot—"nor nobody. He walked in here yistiddy loike Jasus himself, so he did, an' he says, loud an' roarin' like (as he shpoke to yez, just now, sor, God forgive him!), 'is there any atables needed here?' he says. 'Are yez crazy?'

says Oi, 'wid me livin' on nothin' a week and the kids there on twice as much? Is it mockin' an honest wummun ye'd be, wid me man down there wid conshumption and not a month to live and no whiskey?' 'Mock nothin', madam,' he says perloitly, knowin' he was addressin' a lady, 'it's a small dinner Oi'll be havin' the plaishure av fetchin' yez termorrer night an' maybe, a bite av whiskey for the ould man, an' all.' 'Gwan,' Oi says, mad-like, for how should Oi belave in miracles? An' now here—look!—it's in luck yez are, ye brats, this night,"—turning to the children, " 'Sit up an' wait for the gintleman, mother,' ye said, an' begobs ye're rewarr-r-rded."

She paused for breath, and to dry her eyes. Gaunt was dazed, but interested. The younger child, a boy of four, approached him with friendly intent and gazed with awe-stricken eyes upon the splendors of his white waist-coat and silken fob. Then he smiled gloriously, and the squalor of the room vanished.

When the Commodore returned, Gaunt had the mite on his knee, stuffing his head with a wonderful romance about a bear. The veteran still looked ashamed, but he had his whiskey, and he walked with it straight to the cot. The skeleton, "Tom," who was, obviously, much too near the other world to be harmed by any fleshly license he might commit in this, took a long draught and groaned rapturously. The Commodore watched him with applauding eyes. He had brought back with him more whiskey than was contained in the bottle, and he now took a drink, gravely and with great ceremony, with the lady of the establishment. Before leaving he turned to the shambling ten-year-old girl, and with a look of bravado at Gaunt, commanded her: "Kiss me, my dear."

The child stood on tip-toe and did as she was bidden. She also said, quite plainly: "God bless you, sir."

The Commodore turned to his friend and asked, a little thickly, "Did you hear that?"

Gaunt nodded. The four-year-old was drawing picturesque figures on his shirt front, with his pudgy, black fingers, but was unrebuked.

"Say it again, child," said the Commodore, even more thickly.

"God bless you, sir," came the answer, fervently.

As they descended the stairs, the skeleton on the cot slept profoundly. The two children plunged at the opened parcels, eyeing their treasures with avarice. The thin woman had thrown her apron over her head and was weeping.

The two men trudged across to Madison Avenue through the snow and uptown to the Athletic Club. On the way, the Commodore's manner was that of a man who has done something despicable and underbred. He said little, and hummed uncertain snatches of the classic ditty—

> From starboard to larboard, away we go!
> Heave-ho! Roll a man down.

Later, over a Welch rarebit and a mug of ale, he grew more companionable.

"Who are your friends, Commodore?" inquired Gaunt. He knew compliments upon his charity would enrage the old sea-dog, and did not attempt them.

"Eustace, my boy," was the quite irrelevant reply, "you're not a bad sort."

"No?"

"Further than that," pursued the old sailor, emptying his mug and blinking affectionately, "you're a very good sort. If I didn't respect you, I wouldn't forgive you your intrusion."

"What intrusion?"

"Following me up—shadowing me to the house of those poor devils." The speaker's worn look was disappearing.

"Tell me about the poor devils."

"Well," assented the Commodore, gulping awkwardly, after the fashion of a schoolboy trying to brazen out a fault,

"I suppose I might as well make a clean breast of it. You've caught me in a custom I follow, purely for my own pleasure, every Christmas. You see, I give nothing away all the year and there is nobody who cares—that is, I give no ordinary Christmas presents. So I find some poor family that would go hungry otherwise, and give 'em some grub. It pleases them and it's lots of satisfaction to me. I chose to-night because I wanted a pleasant sensation after the opera. So I stowed my bundles at the Normandie till I was ready to go slumming—and you caught me. Will you ever tell?"

"Never fear," laughed Gaunt, touched as deeply as he was amazed—he could see in a mirror the stains of those pudgy fingers on his own shirt front and could almost imagine he had been guilty of an act of charity himself—"your secret is quite safe with me."

"It was unusually enjoyable this year," volunteered the Commodore, musingly, "some doctor, I found, had ordered that poor dying chap to drink whiskey. Think of that, man —*being ordered by a doctor to drink whiskey and not being able to get any!*" The utter pathos of the thought brought the moisture to the speaker's eyes.

"It must have been tough," agreed Gaunt, "and as the man was dying, it couldn't possibly hurt him. I don't know but the whiskey was the most charitable part of your gift, Commodore."

"Assuredly it was," the old philosopher asserted, falling into his old pompousness of manner as the generous stoups of ale took effect. "Rum is a curse to us, as I've told you before, but to the doomed!—a blessing, my boy, a blessing. I am not doomed to death, maybe, but I am doomed to perpetual dissatisfaction with myself. That's why *I* drink." The mug was emptied again. "But I respect those who don't." He banged his mug on the table and looked very much in earnest.

"Commodore," pleaded Gaunt, "pray elucidate. You

have hinted twice in the last ten minutes that you respect me. The sensation of being respected is very novel and very delicious. Why do you respect me?"

"Because," was the answer, delivered emphatically, and, all things considered, with a fair degree of clearness, "I have watched you very carefully, my boy, and—well, I think you'll do. I have seen everything, you know, and I understand."

Unsolicited sympathy is not always welcome, even from friends. Still, Gaunt was curious. Some men were playing billiards near by. He turned his eyes toward their table, away from his friend, as he asked, mildly, "Well, what have you seen, for one thing, Commodore?"

"I have seen for one thing, old man," said Ellis, after another fortifying draught, "how magnificently you swallow the Major. Do you think I haven't noticed the thousand harassings—the stormings—the thousand and one ways in which you are plagued at your work?"

"The Major means well," smiled Gaunt, "he only pretends he's dissatisfied so that when he does condescend to keep quiet, one may appreciate the relief."

"In one respect," vowed the yatchtsman, "the Major is the finest mountebank in the world. He will impose on you to the very last degree, knowing that he is doing so, and then, just at the moment he sees he has gone beyond your endurance, and that you are about to rebel, he will come at you slap-bang with an accusation of the precise wrong of which he has himself been guilty. It is simply—'bluff' at its loftiest limit; and it exercises upon its victim an effect so overwhelming and vast that there is nothing to do but sky one's hands and let it pass. Why, man, haven't I seen how you've toiled and worked, day and night, like a convict? And haven't I heard the old Major roaring and fuming a thousand times at nothing? Boy, I wonder you've any nerves left."

"Those are details," expostulated Gaunt. "The Major

is a little impossible, I suppose, but"—a weary look came into his face—"there are graver matters."

"Yes," assented the Commodore, leaning forward suddenly, with moistening eyes, and grasping his friend's hand, "it's no business of mine, boy, but I've got to tell you that I like your nerve. I've watched your intercourse with the Major with some care. I know what it has been to you. Pardon me—but I've seen the guests you have permitted yourself at times, for the sake of tranquillity, to receive at your house. Pardon me again—but I've seen the Major breakfasting at your house—on chops! And I've wanted to sing psalms in your honor or dirges for you—I scarcely knew which."

"The Major's feud with the sheep," admitted Gaunt, "is certainly implacable. But suppose we talk of something more agreeable, Ellis."

"No," objected the Commodore, eyeing his entertainer, not with sobriety, but with affection, "there's one thing more I want to say, Eustace. It's this, my boy: I've seen the fight you've made. It's a better one than I could have made myself. Look at you—drinking Apollinaris, and I swigging ale like a 'longshoreman. That, however, as you would say, is a detail. Remember, if you please, always, that I have been reading you like a book, and I understand all—*absolutely all*—that you've been standing, and standing like a thoroughbred. I comprehend it, my boy, because I've had some of the same sort of medicine myself in my day. Look here, Eustace: I've always been fond of you—yes, ever since I saw you sail a boat! To-night I like you well enough to tell you something I would not tell to another living person. Well, sir":—the Commodore paled through his bronze and took a longer drink than ever—"to-night I looked my only son in the face for the first time in five years and—*he cut me dead.*"

The voice was hopeless; the blue eyes bright and defiant. Gaunt felt a choking in his throat. "And what I want to

say to you is," continued his friend, "whatever grief life may bring you, do as you're doing now. For what you are, maybe, you have yourself to thank. Even so. Be game. Never weaken. When you've a canker in your soul, fight it!—fight it to the bitter death! It's the only way."

The Commodore shrugged his shoulders and pulled himself together. When next he spoke, his tone was airy and flippant. "Phew!" he mourned, "how thirsty I am!"

The Commodore suffered himself to be put up at the Club for the night and Gaunt went home alone. When near his house he could not help laughing. Cortlandt Ellis, man-of-the-world, educated, brilliant, sailor, clubman, and explorer—fit company, so far as brains went, for any in the land—looking, for his balm and comfort in this life, to the gratitude and the kiss of a grimy pauper brat! Nor had he, Eustace Gaunt (also man-of-the-world, and sometime dreamer, scoffer and cynic), been wholly free from the same curious form of degeneracy; for he had grasped greedily at his undeserved share of the pauper's welcome and drawn a keen pleasure from the maulings of the other brat. What could be the answer to so ludicrous a riddle?

O, marvelous! He looked up at the frosty sky, now clear of snow-clouds, and starlit, and saw silhouetted against the house-tops the shambling figure of the old Florida darky, lurching through the pine-woods. The quaint words came back: *"Ah's happy when Gawd's lettin' me do somethin' for somebody else. You kain't be happy no other way."* There was one solution of the problem!

Christmastide makes gay hours. It was close upon two o'clock, but there were lights in the apartment when he let himself in. Agnes Gaunt was in her own room, in the hands of her maid. In the dining-room, in a heavy mahogany chair, slumbered Major Plum, his locked hands supporting his abdomen, his feet at divergent points of the compass. On the table were bottles and bottles.

"Heavens!" snorted the Major, waking up, "how late you

are, my boo-oo-oo-oy! I hope," he added, with a catechismal hiccough, "that you've not been drinking again, hay?"

Over in West End Avenue, somewhere, some church bells were chiming.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

A SILHOUETTE IN SOUTHLAND

She came floating down the path lightly as a fairy, fragrant as a bouquet—the Girl in Blue. Pale blue, her gown was, of an elusive and impossible fabric that swathed her like a cloud. The Girl in Blue had been a dainty and fragile figure in the ball-room of the great hotel, and when she left it many eyes followed her. These eyes she escaped by gliding, like a slim little blue phantom, among the pillars on the portico, and stealing thence down the broad path to the point where the fountain purled in the gardens and where one might lose, for a moment, all sense of living, and of the earth, in the limitless beauty of the Night.

The Night—ah, such a night as it is there! Night fragrant as honey-suckle, as pellucid as a river, as tender as a kiss. Night made dreamful and radiant by a warm moon that shimmers against the quaint old buildings, with their latticed windows and their balconies inviting a gallant's audacious step. Night restful and delicious by virtue of distant music, and complaining fountains, and arrogant red flowers and mysterious birds that chant nocturnal lullabies from unseen love-nests in the palms. Night sanctified by beauty and made mellow with romance; and over it all the harmony of the vines and the roses and the rare, sweet scent of the sea. Night, in short,—in St. Augustine, in March.

So the Girl in Blue—most choice exotic in all that royal field—paced down the gardens of the Alcazar, timidly at first, as one who dreads pursuit, and then swiftly and more confidently, as she became satisfied she was not perceived. As she neared the fountain, she quickened her steps to a demure little run, her kid-shod feet hitting the gravel quite as heavily as snow-flakes.

By the fountain stood the object of her quest. Naturally it was—a Man. He was in evening dress, of course, and looked healthy and muscular.

He had his back to the great basin, and the end of his cigar blazed redly at the Girl in Blue. She paused before him and looked up into his face, it must be confessed, rather saucily.

The Man came to attention, and the cigar found a drowning-place in the fountain.

"Little Miss Meek-Eyes!"

"Mister Eustace!"

The two greetings were delivered in concert. The names by which they had known each other, he in his youth, she in her schooldays, came to their tongues readily. Their pleasure appeared to be mutual.

"Meek-Eyes," demanded the astonished Dreamer, "how on earth came you here?"

"I am here with Mamma and my aunt and—and Somebody Else," was the reply, softly spoken, "and I really think you had better let go my hands now, hadn't you?"

"Yes, my dear," dutifully replied "Mister Eustace," who had started in guilty terror at the word "mamma,"—mindful, as he was, of that act of piracy at a ball, in Chicago—"I will do anything you like, if you will only stand there before me, beside this fountain—so!—and let me look at you, just as you are."

"You mustn't," objected the Girl in Blue, in tones meant to be mandatory, but which fell into music and remained there; "Jim might not like it."

"And who is Jim, pray?"

"He is—he is—well, he is Mister Somebody Else." The quality of meekness fled from the eyes and became something better. "And he's the dearest—"

"Yes. I understand, and I am very glad for you, Meek-Eyes. And when is it all to be?"

"Oh-h-h-h, dear me! Not for years and years and years."

"That is well. He ought to be willing to wait for such a reward. Meek-Eyes, it is like a verse out of a poem to see you. How long have you been here?"

"Three days, sir."

"And we have not met. That, I suppose, is because I don't go in much for that sort of thing." The speaker jerked his elbow in the direction of the ball-room, whence the plaint of the violins and visions of gliding figures came luxuriously. "But I saw you in the distance to-night, I am sure, dancing. I saw the blue dress. It is the same sort of dress you wore that night, long ago—when I stole you for a dance. You always wore blue then? Do you remember?"

"That was a very wicked act, sir, and I do not think I have forgiven you. I know mamma never has. Mister Eustace," she asked, suddenly, "where's your wife?"

The man was looking across the gardens at the other great hotel, towering in its own principality of fountains and flowers and palms. "My wife?" he answered, absently, but with reverence, "I have not heard from her—not in a very long while."

"*Mister Eustace!*" The eyes, surely, were chameleonic; they had horror in them now.

The offender came to himself with a start. "Meek-Eyes, a million pardons! You mean Agnes, of course. We've been dining with some friends—some army people—and she's upstairs with them somewhere. She's got a sort of companion with her, a rather sneaky miss whom, incidentally, I don't like, but who sings very acceptably, nevertheless. They've gone up there for some music now, I fancy."

"I asked because I wouldn't like her to see me. It's not exactly proper for me to be here, you know. Ah! listen—"

From an open window came the voice of the companion. In such an atmosphere, an even passable contralto may be effective. The song was Mendelssohn's "O Rest in the Lord." When it was done the Girl in Blue said, very softly: "That makes me think of what I stole out to tell you."

"What was it, little one?" These words were spoken softly, too.

"It is a very sacred thing, Mister Eustace, and it seems very fitting to tell it to you here, where it is, oh, so very beautiful. It's only—at home, in Chicago, I see your little boy every Sunday. He sings in the choir of our church—he's a good little Episcopalian, I am glad to say—and you ought to know it, sir, that in his surplice, with his yellow curls and all, he looks more like an angel than—"

"Yes," said the man, who had grown white and was looking across the gardens again, in the direction of the sea this time, "go on, Meek-Eyes. Every syllable that you're speaking now is music."

"Here's something for you," went on the Girl in Blue softly, "it is providential that I had it with me. When I saw you pass through the ball-room an hour ago I went up and got it."

She took from her locket a tiny strand of hair and handed it to him carefully. "He and I are great friends, you know," she said, in hushed tones, for she felt awed by the look in his face; "he gave it to me on my birthday. Was it not sweet of the little chap?"

The man looked at the ridiculous little tuft very closely, in the moonlight, and then raised it to his lips. As he did so, his face grew even whiter. The Girl in Blue, otherwise little Miss Meek-Eyes, stepped forward impulsively and laid a cluster of infantile fingers on his coat-sleeve. "Oh, dear, Mister Eustace," she whispered tremulously, "I *do* hope it will all come right some day."

Her old friend took her hand. Looking at her for a mo-

ment, standing amid that scene of restfulness and beauty, the very incarnation of goodness and innocence and grace, he felt strangely moved. "Meek-Eyes," he said, gravely, "you have given me something rare to remember. You have reminded me of things I've lost. Run now to your Jim. Good-night." He kissed the tips of her fingers and she was gone, with a smile in her eyes and a zephyry rustle of silk and lace.

He stood awhile longer by the fountain in that veritable Garden of Dreams, smoking, and holding in his fingers, clumsily, a yellow curl from a child's head. And by and bye there came from a brilliantly lit window the sound of laughter and a cannonade of corks, and another song—a perverse French song, this time, which accounted, in a measure, for his sentiments toward the singer.

CHAPTER XXXIX

EXIT THE COMMODORE

When a brave man dies, the witnesses regret nothing. It is too brave a sight.

Cortlandt Ellis died as he had sometimes expressed the wish to die, when his time came:—at short notice, in the spring of the year, and with the clasp of a friendly hand to guide him over the brink. The event took all of his associates by surprise, and the manner of its transpiring was abrupt.

He crawled into *The Fang* office one Saturday morning, pale and shivering, though the sun was shining brilliantly outside and the windows of the editorial rooms were flung wide open. He sank limply into the cavernous chair long known as "Ellis' Rest," and in the course of two hours spoke only two words—"Milk Punch." A boy brought the punch from Delmonico's. After absorbing it, the Commodore slept.

Nobody paid much attention to him. Such behavior on his part was not unusual, and was always attributed to one cause. But towards 5 o'clock in the afternoon, when the staff were departing, somebody poked the sleeper and aroused him only with much difficulty. It was then found that the yachting editor could hardly stand on his feet, and that he could speak only in a whisper.

Still there was little alarm, and you may be sure the sufferer himself showed none. The Major, ever generous in such emergencies, sent for a cab. The Commodore explained that he had caught a cold (which cold he managed, in spite of his weakness, to qualify with strong adjectives) and insisted that he would be all right in a few hours. To prove it, he agreed to dine with the Gaunts on the Sunday evening, but declined to allow anyone to accompany him to his abode. As he crept out, leaning heavily on the arm of the boy who had summoned his cab, the old black janitress turned to the Major and observed, cheerfully, "Dat's a dead one." Happily the Commodore did not hear her.

The Gaunts were at breakfast next morning when there came a penciled scrawl from their expected guest, expressing regret that he could not keep his dinner engagement. Gaunt excused himself and rose from the table.

"Where are you going, my boo-oo-oy?" asked the Major, who had chanced in (accidentally, of course) and was in the act of assaulting the familiar and carefully constructed pyramid of chops.

"I think I'll run down and see Ellis," was the reply, "I'm afraid he must be in a bad way."

"But he's able to write," insisted the Major, eyeing his doomed fortress with impatience.

"That's just it," explained his son-in-law. "The old man wouldn't ask anybody to come and look after him, not if he knew himself to be dying, but *he's put his address on his letter.*"

"What does that signify?" The fortress wavered before the flourished weapons of the storming party.

"It signifies a good deal. I never knew till this minute where Ellis lived. Nor did anyone else. It's his way of hoisting the distress-flag, and it's a manly way. I'll wager something handsome he needs help."

"Waugh!" Down came the mutton battlements, and the Major said no more until his son-in-law was passing beneath the window. Pushing his great head out, he hallooed loudly: "Wire me at the Club how he is. I'll pay for everything—waugh!" With the "waugh" there descended a fine snow-shower of baked potato, shaken from the Major's whiskers by the concussion. After which the window-sash came down with a bang.

The address given by the Commodore was in West Twenty-second Street, not far from the river. The house was of decent appearance without; the interior was shabby and stale-smelling—the odor that is for some reason associated inseparably with inexpensive lodging-houses. The caller was shown upstairs by a girl with heelless slippers and holes in her stockings where the heels should have been, but pleasant-faced and obliging withal. As he gained the landing she gave him a wondering look—the look bestowed upon callers at establishments whose inmates have no friends. She indicated the Commodore's door with a curt nod. The second he entered the room he knew his mission was fruitless.

The room was bare of furniture save for the bed, a chair and a crazy washstand. On the chair rested a half-pint flask of whiskey and 60 cents, and in the bed lay the Commodore—engaged, apparently, in a mighty struggle for breath. He had on a thick black sweater over his shirt, which gave him a ghastly look. It showed, at the same time, his superb muscular development, in contrast to which the pallor of his face was piteous. He recognized Gaunt, and seemed to take his visit as a matter of course.

"Awfully good of you, old man," he wheezed, "come over here, won't you, and sit by me, on the bed. No—do something for me first, there's a good chap. That milk punch

I had awhile ago was awfully good. Send the kid into "Del's" for another, won't you?"

He thought himself in *The Fang* office, then, and the last twenty-four hours were blank! "I'll go and get it myself," said Gaunt. "I'll be back in a jiffy."

On the landing he met the girl with the holey hose. He gave her some money and bade her get a jug-full of milk punches at the corner. He had attributed her presence there to avarice but apologized to her, mentally, the next moment. "Sure," she stammered, "it's many the quarther he's give me when he had none for himself," and burst into tears as she descended the stairs—an honest tribute, O Commodore! From the corner he sent telephone messages to his house and to the Doctor. To the Major at the Club he wired, "Ellis is pretty bad. Am looking after him."

When he returned, the Commodore was holding a rather animated conversation with himself, after a fashion sometimes affected by dying men. He seemed pleased to see his friend, and extended him a cordial hand, without, however, permitting his advent to interfere in the least with the steady flow of his remarks. On the contrary, he seemed cheered by the increase of his audience. "You see, dear boy," he said, speaking and blinking rapidly, with apparent pride in his lucidity, "take a ship that's top-heavy, she'll play you tricks in a cross sea; and the woman without ballast will make you turn turtle every time. It gets monotonous seeing myself continually posted for Club dues and I don't believe I'd do a slam of work for the Major, anyway, if I wasn't sure he'd get the yachting notes done by some lubber who doesn't know a jib-sheet from a mess of lobscouse. Give 'em their own way, I say; set 'em before the wind and let 'em run for it! But it cuts when you love 'em, Eustace, my boy, and a man who doesn't love his own wife up to the nozzle of hell-fire, no matter what she does, isn't worth!—still, the boy wasn't doing just right to cut me. That was rather a tough rub on the old Governor, eh, boy?"

There came a knock. Gaunt went to the door and took the jug from the red-eyed wench. He administered a milk punch.

There was a sunny light in the Commodore's eyes as he continued his harangue: "I'm not going to mix in anybody's affairs, old chap," he averred, "but you're a bit of a stayer yourself. I needn't tell you why. That's why I've liked you. You showed me you could sail a boat, you know, and that's good in a westerner. * * * That's right. Fight it—fight it to the bitter death! The Major as a moralist is distinctly humorous, but as a giver of dinners, he wins. If he'll dine me every day, I want no other pay. That's poetry, and the Major's dinners are poems, too. Lord, Lord, how lovely she looked in her white graduation dress! It seemed a sin to take her for a bride. That was before Alf came—Alf, who cut his old dad at the opera. Is that the manners they teach you at Yale, lad? Eustace—his voice rose sharply—*"tell her to come back to me!"*

"I will, old chap," Gaunt assured him, as he wiped the pale lips, "you'll see her again, never fear."

"Well," pursued the Commodore, in milder tones, "I can't give her any more money, you know; because I gave her all I had. It's too bad, though; it's expensive, living in Paris. I've done the same thing for twelve years. What the deuce do you mean by following me on my charity trip, you young cub? Well, their bellies will be filled for one Christmas, anyway. In that case they're a little surer to love God than if you throw tracts at 'em. The old man deserved a drink. The doctor *ordered* him to drink whiskey. Ha! Ha! *Ordered him!* What a time we'd have if our doctor gave *us* any such orders. Say, did you see the kid kiss me, Eustace?"

The Doctor entered and took a look. "Acute pneumonia," he remarked, in response to Gaunt's unspoken query. "He must go to a hospital at once," he declared.

The Commodore, propped up on pillows, opened one eye,

and drawled, with vast impertinence, "Doctor, I'll see you d—d before I'll go to a hospital."

"If you don't, Mr. Ellis," said the Doctor, gravely, "it will go hard with you."

"Will it?" sneered the sick man, unamiably; "I suppose that's all you wise men have time to do—tell a fellow when he's going to turn up his toes. I don't know whether I am going to or not, but it doesn't do me any good to tell me so, and I'm just in the humor not to care. A brave man dies once. From starboard to larboard away we go. Did you see the kid kiss me, Eustace?" The wheezing tones grew fainter. The old salt was asleep.

"That's well," assented the Doctor. Gaunt followed him into the hall, where the frowsy lodging-house wench was stationed, listening. "I suppose," asked the Doctor, lightly, "somebody will guarantee the bills?"

"The bills?—what bills?"

"The hospital bills. They won't send the ambulance without such a guarantee."

"Of course," Gaunt assured him, "the office will pay everything. But is that the usual method?"

"There is a good deal of business and very little charity about New York hospitals. By the way, of course you know your friend is done for. There may be a chance in a million—that's why I'm moving him. I'd send for his friends, if I were you."

"Leave that to me," said Gaunt grimly. He felt a distinct aversion to telling this matter-of-fact person how few the Commodore's friends were. "I'll have 'em send the ambulance about 5," promised the physician, by way of farewell. "I'd like to have him get a little sleep, if he can, before that trip."

Through the light of the fading spring afternoon Gaunt watched the sleeper. He marked every respiration of the broad chest, and the varying expressions that came and went over the kindly face, once gallant and ruddy, now wan and sunken in the extremity of his disorder. Every thought

of grief or mischance of his own had vanished in the contemplation of this passing brother's plight. What a life! And what an end! What a quaint mockery upon the civilization of an imperial, glittering city:—the bearer of one of the proudest names in its annals—a name known to generation upon generation of its aristocracy—passing away alone, on a Sunday afternoon, in a dingy lodging-house,—denied, even, admission to a hospital that his ancestors had very possibly endowed, until the expense had been guaranteed by strangers! Through that spent brain what wondrous thoughts had swept; through that broad breast what tempests of passion heaved. Sorrow, grief, pleasure, riot, love, and, with all the long record of a mysterious carelessness, the kindest, tenderest affection and tolerance toward his race that ever warmed the heart of man and gentleman. Unspoiled by adversity, unsoured by grief, he had trod his course—spendthrift, tippler, idler, maybe, but chivalrous adversary and steadfast friend. A social outcast, perhaps, but—a Man. And this was the end—a wayside lodger's bed in a teeming city his forefathers had helped to glorify. Watching this picture, Gaunt felt slipping from his mind the last vestige of his own morbid dread of death and rising in its place a vast pride in the splendor of his old friend's approach to the Valley of the Shades. Despite the squalor, there was dignity in such a death.

"Ah!" shouted the Commodore, sitting up suddenly, "see them coming! Steady now, boys. Shoot straight, and then—the bayonet. Now!—ah—hurrah! Ah-h-h-h!!!"

Did you ever see an old soldier, delirious, fighting his battles on his deathbed? It is magnificent. It is a strange thing, but true, that a man who has once in his life been brave in battle always carries the evidence of it in his eyes. The light of battle, once lit in the eyes of such a man, remains there until he is dead, and you can tell by looking into them, even during ordinary conversation, that their owner is brave, and has proved it at his life's peril. And now, as Cortlandt Ellis, dying soldier, yachtsman, and gen-

tleman, raised himself in his bed, to urge his comrades on, there blazed and flared in his blue eyes so glorious and superb a light that his friend almost forgot his sympathy, in the desire to cheer with him. Nevertheless, his arm went round him. "Ellis, old boy—Commodore!" he pleaded, "pull yourself together. I'll stick by you." "Steady!" roared the patient, unheeding, "the man that shirks—curse him, I'll blow his head off! Another volley!—that's it! See 'em run—the sons of jackals! Oh, splendid!!!" His voice fell to a whisper: "Softly, there, softly. I've done the same thing for twelve years,—fed somebody at Christmas—I tell you. Pish! Isn't it silly? A man can't drive out of his heart the woman who has borne his child, can he, Eustace? You know that, don't you, boy? Pardon me. That's impolite. But now we're off on another tack, eh?"—Aye, surely; for the soldiering was forgotten and this swirling soul was now on its beloved sea, apparently, and ready to howl in praise of that, too. For, dear me, listen to the poor Commodore:—"Who says we can't do it? I say we can, and I say I will! Gale? Curse the gale! Who cares if it's ninety gales! Whose sloop is she, anyhow? I'll gybe her if it tears the rags off her spars and the stick out of her! If you don't believe it, watch me!"—(O, heavenly moment, gybing a sloop round a mark in a gale!)—"Lay along the sheet, you lubbers, and stand by to haul! Now, over you go, my beauty, so-o-o-o! Blanketed him, by God! Now who says this little ship isn't a lady? Eustace"—this very faintly—"did you see the kid kiss me?"

The ambulance did not arrive until after 6. Just before the men came upstairs the Commodore stretched out a hot hand in the dark and fumbled with it till he found the hand of his friend. The grip seemed to give him strength. "God bless you, old chap!" he whispered, in a cracked voice, with tears in it, "you're a man, after all. You've proved it. I've tried to be one, and I'm afraid I've failed." The next minute he was laughing, a little vacuously, at the ludicrous figure he made whilst being prepared for the journey through the

streets. The men from the hospital handled him like an infant. As they passed down the stairs, bearing the stretcher, Gaunt spied the slovenly hand-maiden crouched in the corner of a landing, sniveling miserably. Sincerity is found, at times, where one least expects it.

The strange little procession crossed the sidewalk, unnoticed save by a group of idlers on the corner. The patient was closely swathed, so that Gaunt could not take his hand in farewell. The vehicle was backed up to the sidewalk, and the stretcher and its contents were hoisted into it with little ceremony. As the uniformed official in charge was civilly asking Gaunt for the name and other particulars, a song came from the interior of the ambulance, weakly, but with a brave attempt at spirit:

> "From starboard to larboard, away we go!
> Heave-ho! Roll a man dow—"

So the Commodore rattled away on his last ride but one—and even that denied him, mind you, until the price thereof had been guaranteed. Drear ending of a colorful life! The friend who watched was reminded of that other bit of doggerel—

> Rattle his bones
> Over the stones!
> He's only a pauper whom nobody owns!

Sixty cents and a flask of whiskey his estate; his last luxury an ambulance ride on credit. A moral for you there, eh, Sir Bon Vivant?

Gaunt told the Major about it at the Club, where Agnes Gaunt picked them up later, and drove them uptown.

And then, oh, strangest of all! They buried the Commodore, who died that night—some even say he resented the grudging of the ambulance by dying in it—in the family vault, with all possible ceremony, and never, perhaps, was there such a turn-out of society for any similar event, in the locality in which it occurred. The Ellis estates in West-

chester had once been large, and the little moss-grown church in which the services were held contained a gathering of socially famous people and an array of spring toilettes the like of which is rarely seen so far away from Fifth Avenue. For this is one of the most cherished customs of this curious little world that we idolaters on the outskirts term the Four Hundred, or the Two Hundred, or the Four Thousand, or what not—to properly trounce and flay and execrate and taboo the old black ram of a great family during his life and hasten to his funeral in order to manifest its appreciation of his having had the tact to die. The Commodore was not exactly a black sheep. He had been too generous for that. But having no ambition, he was a detriment, which was bad; and having given away all his money, he had none for himself, which was worse. So society very justly cut him whilst he was alive and squared accounts by coming and singing lugubrious hymns at him when he was dead. If the display of fine clothes inside the little church on that glorious spring morning was impressive, the array of equipages on the turf without was simply stunning. There were victorias and phaetons and broughams; and some gay bloods, whose spirits were as high as their carts, even undertook to race back to town, along the old Pelham road, some of the wayside inns profiting by the general excitement (and thirst) you may be sure. The poor Commodore's death caused him to be more talked about along that quiet countryside than his life ever had, and if some of us more virtuous people can say as much when our time comes, we will be doing very well, no doubt.

Gaunt did not go to the funeral. He went, instead, across to Staten Island and back with Little Miss Meek-Eyes and her Jim, whom he chanced to meet coming down the Avenue, and who, being now duly engaged, were foolishly and exasperatingly happy. They were going back to Chicago presently and were in raptures over the Waldorf-Astoria, seeing only, of course, the majesty and glitter of that famous hostelry and none of the aches and smarts in the lives of some

of the curious people who haunt its gorgeous corridors. They were very sympathetic, listening with interest to Gaunt's praises of his dead friend; whilst he, for his part, found to his amazement that he could not feel either sorrowful or bereaved. In the glory of the morning he looked across the beautiful blue bay that the Commodore had loved, and felt a stimulation, a sense of actual happiness in the knowledge that his friend had found the end he wished. Perhaps it was because he knew the Commodore could not possibly be any unhappier, wherever it was he had gone.

When he reached the office, in the afternoon, he looked cheerful enough. His affection for the Commodore was a secret of his own, and there was a certain triumph in knowing it had not been discovered. Major Plum was there, in a long frock coat, and with a crape band on his hat. "Eustace," he said, in a loud tone, but mournfully, "I am disappointed in you, very. I did not see you at Ellis' funeral. I fancied you thought more of him than that."

Now it is one thing to love your friend dearly and conceal that love from others; to have that very delicacy tortured into evidence of indifference, and by one who is himself insincere, is another. Memories of a long catalogue of similar bluffs on the Major's part had their effect. Gaunt lost his patience.

"Major," he answered, quietly (for he remembered the scene in that darkening chamber the day before very vividly), "I had my own reasons for remaining away from Ellis' funeral; shall I tell you yours for going to it?"

The entire establishment was listening. For once Major Plum refused to back down on a "call." He went on bluffing. "Why, yes," he replied unamiably; "you'd better tell me, since you know."

"Well, sir," said his son-in-law calmly, "you went to that funeral not on account of any great love you bore Ellis, or any very profound grief for his death, but because, by being there, you could boast to society that you knew him. You cared little for him while he lived and you paid him starva-

tion rates for his work, and when he died you went to his funeral in order that you might use it as an advertisement for your paper. I refused to go because I did not wish to see Society's pitiful mockery of compassion for its dead member. Pardon me for being frank. I would have been less so if you had not attempted to cover up your own counterfeiting by accusing me of lack of respect for the memory of my friend."

The Major bowed his head on his desk and "waughed" into the neck of one of his cats. "My boo-oo-oo-oy!" was all he said.

In the inner office the editor, the Cynical Paragrapher and Captain Clapham, who had heard every word, were on their feet, dancing a noiseless fandango of delight. When Gaunt entered, they fell on him and hugged him; for they, too, had loved the Commodore. Later in the day, when the assistant editor asked the cashier for fifty dollars that he needed, he was told there was no money in the bank. *The Fang* owed him some thousands. The Major had his own methods of argument.

CHAPTER XL

"AND THE SINS OF THE FATHERS—"

The miracles that are wholly unexpected are always the most difficult to comprehend. Gaunt had been on the train an hour before he thoroughly understood that it was to take him to Chicago. He had had vague ideas of making such a trip at some time or another, but would never have made it without some excellent business excuse. That excuse had now been supplied by Major Plum himself. An arch-millionaire, to whom the Major was under obligations, had requested the publication of an article descriptive of a certain phase of life in Chicago, for which he himself was to

supply the material. His son-in-law being the only member of the staff familiar with the subject, and some thousands of dollars being at stake on the issue, the Major had made the selection promptly. Gaunt had accepted the mission with apparent nonchalance. His actual feelings were his own affair. He had no compunction in the matter, because he knew he was going to earn for the Major a sum of money in which he was to have no share. Agnes Gaunt had declined an invitation to accompany him.

He had been on the train, then, quite an hour before it flashed across him that he was finally, and beyond a peradventure, to see his son; and the realization brought him the first contentment he had known in years. He wondered why he could not have had the wit to frame a pretext for this journey long ago; and his next thought was one of uneasiness lest the boy might be absent—ill, maybe. No; if he were ill he would have heard from some of his friends. He would find him, surely, and—what a moment!

It was a perfect day in June, with the scent of the roses in the air and a delicate haze hanging over the river. As the train shot past his old boat club he had seen the Crew—a new Crew now, of course—in the act of putting the shell into the water from the float, and it seemed as if he had been standing there only yesterday, waiting to take his place in it. Many thoughts combined to confuse him, but surmounting them all was an elation for which he made no attempt to account. The knowledge of what awaited him in the West freed his mind, for the time, of the survey of certain unalterable conditions of his own making, and for the first moment in these years he was ridiculously happy. Never had the dear, rare foliage of June waved so sweetly green or the waters of his beloved river shone so heavenly blue. He felt like a schoolboy out on a frolic and longed for somebody to speak to, that he might tell what a splendid world it was.

He found himself afflicted—again for the first time in years—with his old, vain interest in his appearance. There

was a mirror opposite him in the palace-car, and he observed, with astonishment and pleasure, the change that had been effected by ten months of rigidly temperate living. He saw himself with a clear complexion, a steady eye, and remarked, approvingly, the absence of the grossness that hard work in the gymnasium had obliterated from his figure. He caught himself pinching his muscles and smiling gleefully at their satisfactory development. He went farther yet in his extravagance—discovering a new and boyish pride in his spotless linen and the correct fit of his clothes. It is with such quaint manifestations as these that manhood recovers consciousness after long immersion in the bog of indifference or license; and most men find the resurrection sweet.

His heart grew lighter. Time flew. At Poughkeepsie a swarm of homeward-bound college girls fluttered into the car, redolent of graduation rose-wreaths and over-much angel-cake. Their bright, fresh faces, their neat dress and their hilarious spirits were provocative of good humor in others. The solitary traveler who watched them in their careless, innocent merriment began to understand the source of his own cheerful mood. He was beginning to realize, as others have done before him, that with the cessation of surrender to the darker appetites there is rekindled in the human mind the reverence for that which is wholesome and worshipful and clean. Purity—beauty—decency—find a new charm and spell, and they blend and harmonize in a sort of madrigal, chanted by all nature in honor of the subject's awakening to the Better Idea.

Albany, where one dines; a clanging into the great station at Buffalo in the middle of the night, and in the morning a swift rush over the noble Michigan landscape. What is there in the atmosphere of the West, I wonder, that brings to us all, if we have ever lived there, toughened though we be by subsequent cynicism and discontent, a certain indefinable pleasure and excitement? A swift beat of the heart or catching of the breath as one passes a quaint, mottled

village, or skims like mad through an exquisite stretch of emerald wood? A hundred times throughout that journey Eustace Gaunt asked himself if the last three years had not been a nightmare from which he was only now emerging. The recollection that within three days he would be returning to New York—and The Island!—was his answer. The familiar scenes, as he neared the journey's end, awoke even keener emotions. The remnants of the World's Fair buildings, past which the train crept slowly—what a flood of reminiscence came with the sight of those stained and time-worn relics! The idea of the flight of so much time did not seem natural. When he stepped on the platform of the station at Twelfth Street he felt as if he had never been away.

He had a friend who put him up at the Athletic Club, and after the luxuries of bathing and dining, he felt somewhat at a loss what to do. His appointment with the capitalist he had come to see was not until the following evening, and he had as yet evolved no plan to secure the companionship of his son without embarrassment. He wandered rather aimlessly up the avenue, past the Leland and the old Richelieu, sacred to the "Cardinal's" memory, and scene of many a frolic of his scatterbrain youth. He visited the club of journalists to which he had once belonged and found there some familiar figures. He was experiencing a suspicion of the old sense of isolation, when the idea came to him to hunt up Mrs. Fitzherbert. Instantly all was brightness again. A cab bowled him up the avenue to that excellent lady's house in short order.

She came into the room where he was waiting and greeted him with both hands outstretched, royally, kissing him lightly on the forehead, as she had when he was a boy. She did not seem in the least surprised.

"Well," she remarked drily, but with the most generous of smiles, "the bad shilling has turned up, I see."

"I don't believe you are a bit glad, either," retorted Gaunt reproachfully; "are you?"

The lady did not answer immediately. She was looking

at him with kindly eyes—eyes that did not seem a day older than when they had wept for Elaine Gaunt after a doleful interview in a La Salle Street office. "Strange—strange," she murmured, and added, with conviction, "I knew you would come."

"Why?" asked her visitor.

The lady laughed—the happy triumphant laugh of one who believes in Love, because it has been good to her all her life. "Because you have a conscience, my boy," she cried tauntingly, "and because, having that, you *had* to come back. It is nothing to your discredit," she hastened to assure him, noticing the cloud that gathered in his face; "you could not help it. I only wonder you stayed so long. Eustace, the thing that amazes me is that so bright a man could be such a fool. There's a 'bull' for you."

"Dear lady," pleaded the sinner, "why dwell on the dark scroll of my crimes when there is so bright a picture as yourself to discuss? Tell me how the years have gone with you."

The lady shot him a disdainful look. She ignored his question, and asked abruptly: "What did you come for?"

Gaunt hesitated for a moment before answering, a little sullenly: "I came to see the boy."

Mrs. Clarence Fitzherbert laughed again that happy, triumphant laugh. (How a clever woman, when she is really happy herself, does love to witness the conquest of another!) She glanced at her caller quizzically and demanded, "Anybody else?"

Gaunt looked uneasy, and fiddled with his gloves. "What a queer question!" he drawled, with a rather comical effort at nonchalance. "I came to see the boy, and I came to ask you to bring him here to your house for me. I do not wish to do anything ungraceful, or embarrass anybody. I can't very well go after him myself."

His manner was not convincing. Once more Mrs. Fitzherbert threw back her handsome head and laughed. She pointed a finger, taper and rose-tipped as a girl's, at the

Returned Prodigal, and announced, scornfully: "You came to see Elaine."

There was a long pause. Gaunt traced patterns on the carpet with his stick and made no answer.

"My boy," said the lady, with infinite gentleness, "you're old enough to have a little wisdom. You must make no mistake this time. I won't go after your boy. Go after him yourself. You've the right. Go and call on Elaine to-morrow morning and tell her you've come to see him. I wager you'll be less embarrassed than she."

Gaunt looked relieved. "I believe myself that's the best way," he said, rising; "and I am glad to hear you say it." This good friend of his youth patted him affectionately on the back as he was making his adieu, and smiled at him with the ever-sunny eyes. "You do very well, Eustace," she admitted, with easy patronage; "you look healthy and wholesome, and you have the New York manner of easy superiority, whether counterfeit or the real thing, I can't say. But you can't deceive your old friend, my boy. Go ahead. Do right. And whatever you are—be natural. Don't invent anything and don't conceal anything. That's the best advice I can give you."

Oh, bliss of all blisses—to receive the advice for which one longs but scarcely dares to hope! Gaunt dismissed his cab and walked down the Boulevard with the airy strut of five-and-twenty. He was perhaps unaware that the craving for the sight of his son was the counterpart, accentuated, of his solicitude for the welfare of the wife. He would not have been guilty of such an absurdity as the request for an interview with Elaine, but the possibility of meeting her by accident, or at least in the performance of a duty, filled his whole being with a beautiful and mysterious peace. He walked all the way down town to the Club, feeling more like an honest man—odd paradox of unreason!—than he had since a somewhat fatal trip to Washington, at the close of the World's Fair. He slept like a child and awoke with the sensations of an athlete.

He made as careful a toilet as any jackanapes bound to his first love-tryst. As he made his pilgrimage to his old home that bright morning, the past came back to him, chapter by chapter and leaf by leaf. He remembered most of its joys and all of its follies. As he approached the house he lost some of the jauntiness of his manner.

While still at some little distance he saw and recognized his son, and the sight brought him a pang that he never forgot. He could not have told, upon oath, whether it was agony or joy. The boy was playing, happily enough, on the steps. He had grown tall in these three-and-a-half years —tall and straight and slender. He had the familiar yellow curls and looked frank and fearless—in short, thoroughbred. This much his father marked, as he came to where he stood, and stopped.

The youngster looked up from his play with an expression of polite inquiry. He thought this passer a well-dressed person, but rather rude, to stare so.

The man could think of nothing more dignified to say than "Hello, Billy."

"Hello," replied his son, dutifully, but with an interrogation point in his voice.

"Who am I?" asked the father, in a tone as if he had eaten nothing.

The child scanned him with grave, attentive eyes. "I don't know," he confessed, indifferently.

It was some moments before the man spoke again. Here, then, was a son growing toward manhood in absolute ignorance of his father's face. It was perhaps the keenest retribution of all. He had thought hitherto, selfishly, of the grief of a father deprived of a son. What wrong had the son himself done that he should be robbed of his father?

Another haunting line from the Scriptures: *"Visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children—"*

Who was to blame?

CHAPTER XLI

"A MAN'S WIFE IS ALWAYS HIS WIFE"

Elaine Gaunt was in an art studio, in the down town business district, receiving a lesson in water-color sketching. There were three or four other women, of about her own age, in the apartment. She was intent upon her work when some powerful influence compelled her to look up. For an instant she thought herself crazed. In the doorway stood her little son, holding his father by the hand.

She laid aside her work, with perfect coolness, and stepped out into the hallway, closing the door as she came, that none behind might see. Her heart was beating hard enough to choke her, but her eyes were serene and tranquil. There was not a tremor in her voice as she spoke, after this separation of years, to the man whom she still, with womanly perversity, regarded as her husband.

"Where did you find him?" was her greeting. She nodded toward the child.

It took Gaunt some moments to frame a reply. He of the sometime quick wit—man of experience and of the world, and of a ready enough vocabulary with all women, found himself tongue-tied and abashed in the presence of the Wife. He saw before him the one dear Love of his youth, and it seemed just then as if the world had stopped.

"I went to the house for him," he answered presently, in a hurried half-whisper. "I knew you would be worried if you came home and found I had taken him; so, as he knew where you were, I thought it best to come and tell you."

O lame and wretched quibble, when even as he spoke the blood was pumping through his veins and his very soul singing for ecstasy at the sight of her! Elaine Gaunt was generous. She did not even smile.

Her own composure increased as she detected the embarrassment by which her son's father was beset. She even felt compassionate; for she remembered, of old, how he had prided himself on his self-control in emergencies. And this, mind you, when there was surging through her own gentle breast such a storm as may only be known by just such natures, after long and patient endurance of sorrow. Unselfishness most rare. "Would he have gone with you," she asked gently, "without my knowing?"

"No," replied Gaunt promptly; "now that I remember it, he insisted on coming to tell you, first." (Pooh! "Now that I remember!" Why, he had called down heavenly blessings on the boy for his suggestion, and rewarded it with five dollars.)

The Chief Factor in the situation now relieved its tension. "Father," he protested gravely, "I think this is dead slow."

His parents looked at each other and laughed. Oh, what a world of sunshine and of music! Were there any idiots in it who were ever sad?

People were passing and re-passing through the hall, busily, indifferently. The strangely united trio stood by the doorway of the art studio, unnoticed. "Father," again protested the Chief Factor, with solemn reproach, "I am very hungry. You promised to take me to lunch."

Gaunt turned to Elaine. "Come with us," he said.

How queer it sounded to her! Come with "us!"—when they had not met for years. She was oddly interested in seeing father and son standing together, side by side, and scanned them closely. The two figures seemed clear and distinct one instant, blurred and confused the next. She forgot to answer.

"Come with us, dear," urged Gaunt again. "I don't believe," he added gently, "that you will ever regret it."

She blushed like a bride. "How can I?" she demanded. "What would people say?"

In his extremity, the man turned to the Chief Factor for aid. "Tell her to come, Billy," said he.

"O, come on, mother." This impatiently. The seven-year-old appetite knoweth not sentiment.

Actually, the child was behaving as if he had known his father all his life. Noting it, his mother felt a pang of something resembling jealousy. "Very well," she acquiesced, with reluctance, "only you must not let me be seen with you."

Again that wonderful communion of sunshine and song. The man strove to steady his voice: "I will go and telephone to the club for a carriage," he said hurriedly; "come down to the street door and we will drive over to the North Side somewhere." He fled with great strides, compelling his innocent son to race to keep up with him. He was in dread that she might retract her consent.

After they had gone, Elaine tried to realize what had happened. She felt startled and afraid. She had never forgotten her husband, but she had tried to put the memory of him away, decently and kindly, as a possession in some ways sacred, and surely for the contemplation of no eyes save her own. Such an event as his appearance before her in this amazing fashion had never crossed her mind, and the emotions that it awakened in her were mysterious. She thought she had touched the limit of suffering on the day that saw her husband married to another woman, but at this moment she felt a vague apprehension that this meeting with him was to involve further pain or sacrifice of some sort. Nevertheless she prepared herself, with alacrity and cheerfulness, to face it—because that seemed to be the course desired of her by the man she had once loved. That is womanhood.

She excused herself to her associates without difficulty. One of them—a stout, comfortable girl with plain features who had seen the man and boy outside and now saw the set look in Mrs. Gaunt's face—gave her hand a sympathetic

squeeze as she went out. She rang for the elevator and gained the street without incident. She was moving in a sort of daze, with no very intelligent idea of motives or events. The crashing of the traffic distressed her, and her heart still beat fast beneath her becoming shirtwaist and light jacket. She could not have told whether it was pain or pleasure that possessed her when she saw her little boy's face peering from the window of a brougham that had driven up to the curb and his father opening the door for her to enter.

At last!

For a mile it was a silent drive. Husband and wife—for the woman's illogical reasoning had transferred itself subtly to the brain of the man, convincing him that their separation was a mere mockery and their old relationship inviolable and eternal—sat side by side, each trying to master the mental tumult. Before Elaine there was passing in swift flashes the brief panorama of her life—girlhood—happiness—sorrow—resignation—all! To Gaunt there had come a joy the intensity of which rendered him numb and speechless. He saw before him his son, fashioned after his own image, slender, straight and strong—the one treasure of his whole existence—and beside him the woman who had given the treasure for his worship. So his soul passed from the worship of the one idol to the dearer and sweeter one. He still felt awed and humbled, and could not bring himself to look Elaine in the face or to speak to her. She was looking straight before her with the soft, kind eyes that he remembered, and he stole furtive glances at her profile, with a feeling that even that much boldness on his part was an impertinence. He marked every detail—the delicate little tendrils of hair at the nape of her neck, the lines of her figure, to which matronhood and years had lent a sweeter dignity and grace; and as he did this he recalled, with yearning, every precious charm of person and mind that she had ever possessed. Her beauty was an inspiration, her presence a fragrance. Every foreign thought or sentiment or condi-

tion was swallowed up in the one glorious realization that he was here with her—now! To-morrow? He knew of no to-morrow. He did not care if there were to be none.

They were driving down Rush Street. He turned to her presently and tried to speak, but the words died on his lips in a mumble. She gave him a smile of reproof, murmuring: "Don't let's say anything, Sonny. It will do no good."

Even then, you see, she was feeling for him and not for herself. She felt, indeed, as if she had now two children to manage instead of one.

Her hands, in their small brown gloves, lay limply in her lap. Gaunt took one of them, as timidly as if the act had been a sacrilege, in his own, and it rested there, passively. In such faint contact, at such a time, there may lie an understanding beyond words. The trees along the roadway were glistening in a glory of early summer foliage and in their branches sundry robins and wrens were chanting lustily. Harmonies in which hearts could join. Oh folly supreme and most precious!

Before the sweet treble of the Chief Factor, the situation's tragic element once more vanished. "Father," it piped, plaintively, but with respect, "do we ever eat?"

"Hush," reproved his mother, with a smile that turned her eyes into rain-washed jewels. "I think," she said, turning to his father, "you had better fulfill your promise. He is not likely to give you much rest until you do."

Gaunt sat up straight, grinning at his offspring like a schoolboy. "Billy," he declared, employing the nickname of his own choosing, in the days of the youngster's babyhood, "your point is well taken and strictly in order. The cabby knows where to go. We'll be there in a minute."

He presently found a pleasure, absurd because so keen, in the mere knowledge that he was supplying the food these two put into their mouths. The restaurant to which they went was obscure, and they had it practically to themselves. No movement or expression of his son escaped the father. He devoured with his eyes the shape of the boy's hands, the

details of his dress, and listened to his chatter as devoutly as if he had been a bishop. Once, when his mother reproved him for some prandial misdemeanor, he looked at her in amazement. To him, in his heart-famine, every look and act of the child was such perfection that the idea of his possessing a fault seemed impossible. Elaine herself made but a pretense of her luncheon. To her it seemed so wonderful to see these two together—these two beings who were moulding, whether with or against her will, her entire life—that it seemed to her ridiculous to attempt to either think or speak. She felt herself drifting into a sea of impossible mystery and conjecture and cared little whither it led. Her only lucid and definite thought was that this man, her child's father, and her own husband, belonged, of right and law, to another woman; and, with the exact and precise degree of irrationality that had once marked her husband's contemplation of distressing situations of his own, she was inclined to blame any and every one in the world save herself for the circumstances. She was able to trace, in the two, certain points of physical resemblance and testimonies of refinement, as well as identities of manner and speech; and these discoveries served to allay the resentment that arose, at odd moments, in her heart, against the man who had returned to trouble her at a time when she flattered herself she was learning to forget. She noticed, too, that, while Gaunt pressed her to take champagne, he drank none himself. If the discovery caused her to think the world was coming to an end, she made so sign.

They drove, after luncheon, through Lincoln Park, delicious in its emerald dress, and so to the country roads beyond, which Gaunt recognized, with renewed stabs of conscience as the scene of crazy midnight racings, in times agone, behind the sorrel colts. The companionship, and the incident of the meal, had loosened their tongues somewhat, and the man drank again and again, to the last drop of its sweetness, the old familiar music—the music of the voice of the Wife. Tremulously and sweetly at first, and then with more confidence, Elaine talked of their boy, of his

bright ways, his gentleness and the care she was taking with his education. Gaunt listened to her dreamily as they swept along under the arching boughs. He was unconscious of the purport of nine-tenths of her words. He read only, in all she said, the tender care, the infinite solicitude of the mother for the child deprived of a father, and he searched her face, hungrily and selfishly, for the sign of a similar interest in himself; his own senses, the while, swimming with an idolatry that he did not dare express.

At an old roadside hotel he sent his driver to the stables and the three sauntered over the lawn and into the stretch of woodland beyond. He recognized the place—odd freak of memory—as one to which he had driven Major Plum out to dinner on a summer night when they had had to spend some hours together. The Major had sat on that very porch, punishing champagne and complimenting the weazened and toothless old landlady on the excellence of her dinner. And—yes, now that he looked again, he recognized that very table out there among the trees—oh, the humiliation, now!—as one at which he had sat with Imogen Leal, her sister, and some others on the night of a gay frolic, early in their acquaintanceship. He felt as if he were offering Elaine an insult in bringing her here to-day, but shook off the reflection, and passed on.

He trod the turf jauntily, springily. Manlike, because satisfied and happy himself, for the moment, he fancied that others must be so. Elaine paced along at his side and he noticed, with the old admiration, how demurely her feet, which had always been his especial vanity and weakness, glided through the grass from beneath her skirt.

"Does it not seem wonderful?" he asked of her, as he watched the little fellow frisking, carelessly and happily, some rods ahead. "I mean," he added, in answer to her look (poor child! it was all a little too wonderful for her to understand, as yet), "I mean his being here, with us."

"Yes," she replied simply, and with a sigh, "it is very wonderful."

And then the really wonderful thing happened.

The boy came running back, carrying in his hand an oblong block of wood. "Father," he said, seriously, "I want to take this back in the cab, and when we get home you must whittle me a yacht out of it."

"I can't do that, old man," explained his father, stooping to stroke the yellow curls, "because I have to go away tomorrow; but when I get back, I'll send you the finest boat there is in New York."

The child stepped back two paces and surveyed him in astonishment. "Do you mean to say," he demanded, shrilly, "that you're going away directly you've come?" He added with a half-sob, "That's not very nice of you, father."

He was struggling manfully not to cry—not a very touching sight, maybe, for one accustomed to it—but there came into his beautiful face the grieved look—ah, God, it was that well-remembered look of years before—the look in the face of the child in the café, in New York, which had first recalled it! And before the sight of that grief—grief that he had placed in the child-heart and was powerless to remove—the father underwent a misery more acute than any he had yet known. It taught him, before all else, the pitiable mockery of this day—the bitter pretense of the pleasures he was enjoying—enjoying selfishly and greedily, regardless of the suffering it might entail upon others. The utter cruelty and hopelessness of the situation flashed into his brain, and stunned him. His presence there seemed a profanation; his vanished elation a crime.

He looked again on his son's face, still grieved and forlorn, and half averted his own. He lifted his hands, with a helpless gesture, as if seeking to ward off a calamity, and muttering, "Billy, old man—I'll do anything—anything you like, only don't cry. Elaine," he demanded sharply, turning to her, "for God's sake make him stop looking like that."

He sat down, weakly and stupidly, on a fallen tree, looking white and ill. There was a mountainous lump in his throat, and he felt as if he were choking.

Suddenly he looked up at Elaine: "You must have a poor

opinion of me," he declared, almost fiercely. "I know it is not manly—"

"Eustace"—she made the answer with conviction—"you are more of a man at this moment than you ever were in your life."

She came close to him and touched her hand lightly against his check, a pretty way she had had, in the old days, of showing sympathy. The touch gave him an ecstasy nameless and infinite. He looked again into her eyes and saw the tears there. And he knew, even now, that it was because she knew him to be suffering, that she suffered; that her sympathy was always for him and never for herself. Abnegation at its apogee. Oh the beauty of it!

He stretched out his arms, but she smiled sadly and shook her head. "Then," she asked, in a timid half-whisper, seating herself beside him on the tree, "you are not happy, after all?"

"No. And you?"

"I have not been happy a day since you went away." She made the confession with some degree of pride, as well as with solemnity.

Gaunt heaved a great sigh. "It was true then, little woman—what I told you that afternoon in the office? You remember?"

"I have never forgotten a word of it. I have tried to and could not."

"Then, when you divorced me, you had not ceased to love me?"

"I loved you more the day after I had divorced you than I ever did before."

"Then why in God's name did you do it?" He felt the brutality of the question as it left his lips, but he could not withhold it.

Her girlish mouth quivered ever so slightly. "Sonny, dear," she begged, "don't let us speak of that now. Tell me why you are not happy."

"I think you know why."

"Yes, I know—that. But you ought to try to be happy. What is it stands in the way?"

"Peace of mind." As he answered, Gaunt pointed at their son, now romping happily away, his woes forgotten. Elaine understood. Her hand stole into another's hand—the hand that had led her away from school to matinees.

"I know," said the man, speaking deliberately, with his eyes scanning the ground, "that I can never again have any peace of mind, and I am prepared to go to my grave without it. There are things that stand in the way—things of which, as a man, I can't speak, but which make anything resembling peace, or rest, for me, in my house, impossible. I recognize fully that the conditions that surround me are of my own making and I accept them as part of my atonement to you. I have made, in the last year, certain changes in my ways of living. They have brought me face to face with life as it is and"—his features hardened—"I will go through with it, as a dead friend, whom I loved dearly, expressed it, 'to the bitter death.' I know that I am alone to blame for what I have brought on myself, and I can cheat Fate by defying it and fighting it to a finish. It is only the thought of you and the boy that weakens me. It has been heaven to me to see you. To leave you will be like going to hell."

She had watched him as he was speaking and felt a surprise in the set jaw and determined eyes. In the days of his dreaming, he had never looked so.

And then the woman in her spoke. She could not have stifled the question if she had died for it. "You can't love her, then?" she whispered.

Gaunt looked at her long and earnestly. "A man loves once," he said, "although he may imagine differently. And it is only while that love lasts that he lives. The rest of the time he is walking about dead."

"Isn't she good to you—your wife?" She could not forbear that question, either.

A dark look came into his face. "Don't," he said, quietly.

"I told you there were things of which one could not speak, and I repeat that whatever my lot is, I deserve it. Is not that enough?"

Her voice fell again to a whisper—oh, such a womanly whisper it was, too—like a lullaby: "Forgive me, Sonny. I did not mean to hurt you." And in her heart there was the strangest feeling in the world. She guessed intuitively that this other woman, who had taken her place, was disagreeable, or worse, to her husband, and she was grateful to her for it—in the proportion that she felt he hated her. If she had suspected her of being affectionate or charming, she would have wanted to kill her. "Do you ever think of me?" she added, with a wan smile.

Gaunt turned a miserable face towards her. "If it were not for my thoughts of you," he said, "I could not go on living."

"Tell me about them." This still more sadly.

He answered earnestly, as if he were reciting the Creed: "My thoughts of you are with me always, and everywhere. I have been to far-away places, and you have followed me. You have been with me on the land and on the sea, in the day and the night. When I have been where it is most beautiful, I have seen you most often. You have sailed with me to tropical countries and smiled at me from flower-beds and fountains and sunsets. I have dreamed, on seas and in gardens, of every little detail of our life together, and my brain has painted for me, over and over, every exquisite contour of your body, every sacred line of your face. And this, mind you, when I have been with some one else. It is cowardly, maybe, to feel so, but—can you imagine the agony of it?"

She was selfish at last. She was blind to any such "agony" of his, so she could hear more of such thoughts of her! "I had heard you were always traveling—especially in the winter," she answered, with gravity.

"Yes," said Gaunt, rather savagely, "it's a way of killing time." He was regaining some of his buoyancy, as a man

who is worth his salt always will when speaking of his love. He sprang to his feet and bent over her, pushing her hat back and holding her face tenderly between hands. When he spoke again, whatever of soul he possessed was in his voice.

"Beloved—oh, best beloved, listen: Our little hour together is nearly done. Before it ends, look at me in the old way—so!—with your dear, dear eyes, and believe me. What I have done, I have done. I know the penalty, and can pay. In the old days I wronged you, and I wronged our son, when I caused you to take him away from me. I can't atone for that—not in a million lifetimes. There isn't anything that can be said now—nothing! nothing! Only this—that I've loved you through all the years, as I told you I would—that I love you now and—hush! don't speak. Perhaps I'm doubly a traitor for saying this now—here!—and I won't ask you to say a syllable back. You wouldn't, any way, not if it killed you to keep silent. That's your way. It was shabby in me to ask you to come. But if you knew what this day has been to me you'd be glad you didn't refuse. It's been—heaven. You believe that, don't you—little wife?"

She stood up, turning white at the word, and asking timidly: "Eustace, what right have you to call me that?"

"Right!" he almost shouted, in apparent rage with her, though there was pouring from his eyes such a passion of worship as women rarely see—"the right of Manhood—the right of Heart—the right of the law of God! A MAN'S WIFE IS ALWAYS HIS WIFE, I say, no matter what fools—Look there at that boy, bright as a star, beautiful as a prayer. Can you look at him and talk of 'Right?'" He stopped, realizing alike the futility of his logic and the impotence of his raving. He stood facing her, irresolute.

Who shall know of the battle in that wife's heart? Every instinct of memory, of passion, of pity, told her to forswear wisdom and give her embrace and her kiss, if only for the fraction of a second, to the man whose whole being, she

knew, would be wrapped and welded in hers as long as they both lived. The man knew her better than she knew herself and he would not sue for that which would involve humiliation for her in the bestowal. As she hesitated, he sank down on the fallen tree once more and let his face fall forward into his hands.

His little son darted up and began twining his fingers in his hair. He was out of breath with his long running. "What's the matter, father?" he panted. Gaunt took him on his knee and kissed him. The disconcerting lump had risen again in his throat.

So they stayed there yet a few minutes longer, an odd little group, in the deserted garden. The sun was sinking as they came away and a breeze too chill for June blowing from the Lake. The child seemed the only happy one of the three.

On the way back to town Gaunt leaned far back in the carriage, with his eyes closed, and a slim hand imprisoned in the clutch of his own heavy glove. Elaine did not disturb his reverie; she seemed contented to chat now and then with the boy, who, for his part, saw nothing but the delight of an unexpected day's outing. Just before they reached the bridge, she turned and said, very gently: "Sonny, dear, I scarcely know what to say or think. It's all so strange. But I've been very proud of you to-day. You're a man now, you know. * * * * Sonny, you must go back"—a little catch in the words here—"because it's your duty to go back; and you must be brave, and do your best, do you hear? I shall be thinking of you, and praying for you, all the time, and I feel, somehow, that some day I shall see you again. * * * * God bless you, Sonny. * * * * Now, you must let me out when you get to Field's. * * * You may take Billy somewhere to dinner with you, but send him home early, and be sure to come to church to-morrow and hear him sing."

Gaunt gave the order to the driver. As they turned into Wabash Avenue he drew the curtain over the window near-

est the sidewalk. Forced to protect his own family from the scandal of being seen in his company!—ludicrous! As the carriage stopped, Elaine bent over him and touched her lips lightly to his forehead. She was rewarded for this act by her son, who, as she alighted, poked his head from the window and bawled, in consternation: "Oh, mother, you've kissed a man! And you said you never would!" Again he had relieved the tension.

She stood for a moment watching the vehicle thread its way through the crowded thoroughfare. The scene was familiar to her since her childhood, but to-day it looked crazy and unnatural. Why should that carriage be driving away with her son and his father in it, and she afraid, or ashamed to be seen going with them? It was something cruel and unheard-of. They would have a jolly dinner of it, no doubt, and—she smiled very sweetly as she went into the great shop, for she realized what that dinner would mean to the man, longing every moment for her. When she went home, after completing her modest purchases (which were purchases, as usual, for others and not for herself) she felt very, very serious, but she could not have made oath that she was unhappy. In these later years she had held no communication with Eustace, but there had never been an hour in which she had not felt convinced he would return. She had grown accustomed to the idea of his belonging, by law, to another woman, and the knowledge that he must go back to the other was an anguish, but—he loved her—Elaine. She had known it, and he had said it, and the declaration was a vindication of the principles she had been taught and a triumph for her motherhood and for her heart. The man she had put away had returned to her of his own will, had acknowledged his misdeeds, and had expiated them, in a measure, by virtue of his own suffering. She could not reason out the situation even yet; but she felt that the day marked an epoch in their lives, and she was content to wait and see. So she went home, a little pale, a little shaken and

tremulous, a little uncertain whether to laugh or to cry, but quite sure that the man who had been her husband had been tried in the fire and had improved in the process. She would not have admitted it to her best friend, but there was a choir of mischievous elfs making music in her own heart as she entered her door; and they sang louder when she was compelled to listen, though not unwillingly, to the tales of her black maid concerning the wondrous smart gentleman who had taken the little master away in the morning and given her two dollahs for making him ready. And in an hour or so the little master himself came home, very tired, and if truth must be told, rather cross, but also stuffed with tales, as well as with the delicacies that gave him a piteous indigestion during the night. He told of a fine dinner at the Club and of many men who had greeted his father as if he had been long lost, and some of whom sang songs and had a jolly good time with them generally, afterwards. They had been shopping first, however, and he brought with him a variety of spoils—bicycle suits, baseball bats, shotguns, and what not, for he had insisted on bearing home the booty himself—the packages including a trifle from a jeweler's, for his mother, which it is scarcely necessary to say that lady put away safely, and with great care. It was an entertaining narrative and formed a soothing "amen" to an eventful day.

Perhaps her most sacred emotion of all came to her next morning, in church, as she stood and watched her little yellow-haired cherub leading the march of surpliced choristers in the processional hymn, and looking, alas! far too angelic for the sturdy athlete-in-miniature she knew him to be in lay life. The congregation was what is known as a fashionable one. That is to say, there were standing, all about her, ladies of high degree whose names were frequently in the newspapers and whose toilettes, even in church, were sufficiently brilliant to justify reportorial description. She did not envy one of these; no, not one, for

she felt, as she looked across at the bright little face and caught the ring of one treble voice, that she had there one treasure that all India could not buy. How the hymn rang out—

> Like a mighty army
> Moves the Church of God.

* * * * * *

And the refrain:

> Onward, Christian soldiers,
> Marching as to war!

It was not vanity, for she had little of that, but the chorus sounded to her like a paean of comfort, or applause, for her patient endurance of suffering, and the very harmonies were gilded and beautified, as it seemed, by the touch of Nature, and of Life; for the sunlight was streaming through the stained windows like a glory and in the air was the scent of lilies and violets. By turning her head slightly she could see the Cherub's father, in a distant pew, and she could feel, with unerring intuition, every thought that was passing in his mind. She took a girlish pride, even now, in his appearance, for he was as scrupulously groomed as he had been in his twenties, and in his correct frock coat, with the white carnations in the lapel, looked better and stronger and more youthful than before he had gone away. There was that in his face now—calmness, seriousness, self-control—that told her of his grasp upon the actual purposes of life; and seeing him here, in this way, she reflected for the first time upon one of the consequences of her course. By her act, she had banished him from this Church—the church of his fathers, in which he had been reared, even as his son was now being reared. Was that quite just? She could not tell; and so the service went on, grandly and sweetly—the most beautiful church service in the world!—and in every chant, and in every prayer, there was a bond that drew three hearts closer together that rare, sweet morning in June:—the heart

of a man, the heart of a woman, and the heart of a little manchild. The organist was in a joyous mood that Sunday, coaxing from his instrument, in his voluntary, the most exquisite and haunting of melodic creations; and even as they trembled and swayed to the lofty roof, there came to the wife and mother a thought holy and tender and righteous. She saw in the Man's face, as he watched his son, that the Son was to him the treasure dearest in life—dearer, maybe, than herself. Well then, *she* had given him the Son, the Treasure, had she not? Brought him into the world with love and anguish—blood of her heart's blood—fruit of her being—flower of her very flesh? Yes, that was true. And in that, if she had dealt with the Father unjustly, there was reparation; for was not a Son, a living Life, dearer than any Creed or Church?

The harmonies swelled again. The little gold head of the Cherub disappeared in the recessional and the faint amen was wafted from the sacristy. The people were passing out, some of them smiling and bowing to her, and she felt, as she neared the door, that the Man's eyes were upon her. She knew that he would not risk compromising her by recognizing her there and she paused for a moment in the doorway to let him pass. In the crush of richly dressed worshipers his arm brushed hers as it hung at her side; their gloved hands met for a swift instant in a stealthy clasp, and the fragrance of her breath warmed his cheek. He left the church with a firm step and an impassive face, looking neither to right nor left. As he passed into the avenue, she saw him lift his hat, though he did not glance back, and she knew the salutation was for her. She knew he was to leave for New York that afternoon.

Then she went home, feeling forsaken.

CHAPTER XLII

THE FERVOR OF TRUE AFFECTION

"You don't care for me."

"I am sorry you discovered it."

"You never did care for me."

"If you are certain of that, it is useless to make denials."

"You are indifferent and heartless."

"I try not to let other people think so."

"You are always thinking of other people. That is why I hate you."

"It would scarcely be wise to let other people know we disagree."

"I don't care what other people think. You do. You are able to consider other things. My happiness or unhappiness should be everything in the world to you."

"It is because I dislike to see you unhappy that I regret to see you make yourself so."

"How do I make myself unhappy?"

"By beginning conversations like this."

"Is there anything to prevent my talking if I wish to talk?"

"No."

"I will say what I please."

"You generally do."

"It is your horrible indifference that exasperates me. You never show any feeling."

"I try to think of ways to avoid such scenes as this. If I permitted myself to have any feeling, I should not be able to think."

"Why can't you get in a rage with me? I should like you better then."

"If I were ever to get in a rage with you, there would be only one of us left."

"You think yourself a model husband, I suppose."

"No man is that."

"And they say you were such a blade in Chicago. Who could believe it?"

A silence.

"Reformation doesn't improve you."

"That is quite true."

"I despise 'reformed' men. So does everybody."

"Everybody is right. The mere fact that they *have* reformed proves that they needed to. It places them under suspicion for the rest of their lives."

"I agree with you."

"Then having reached a point on which we can agree, would it not be wise to stop?"

"I shall stop when I choose."

"When will that be?"

"When I have made you angry."

"You will be hungry before then."

"You are in a particularly beastly mood to-day."

"I am in a hopeful one. I am hoping I may get away to my tent presently, and work."

"Your work can wait."

"I am afraid not. The Major wouldn't tell you so."

"You only care for your work because it gives you an excuse to get away from me."

No answer.

"Miss Dearthing told me that."

"Miss Dearthing does not like me, I am afraid."

"Sometimes, when you are at work there, in your tent, and I know that you're not thinking of me—not any more than you are of Jerry's dogs, or that old fir tree, it makes me furious."

"I am sorry."

"And I want to come and throw something at you, or shoot off guns outside the canvas. I will, some day."

"It would not surprise me."

"Are you going to drink anything to-day?"

"No."

"Why?"

"The doctor's advice."

"Not for virtue's sake, then?"

"By no means. The doctor is a good fellow. He has promised that if I don't drink anything for two years, I shall have a new stomach. It's like being good for a prize."

"I know why you don't drink."

"Yes?"

"It's to make people think horrible things of those who do. I hate a prig."

"So do I."

"You were a better fellow when you drank. We never quarreled until you stopped."

"I did not know we were quarreling now."

"Are you never tempted to get drunk?"

"Yes."

"When is the temptation strongest?"

"Now."

"Why don't you, then?"

"Because it would tempt me to take you seriously."

"You treat me shamefully."

"In what way?"

"In every way. You wish you had never married me."

"I have never said so."

"No, you are too polite. I've told you that if you would be brutal I could forgive you."

"We have been over this ground so often. Shall I take you out on the water, or would you rather go bathing?"

"I prefer to remain just where I am. We must have an understanding."

"We have had seven that I know of, since yesterday. Won't they do?"

"Do you intend to treat me fairly, or do you not?"

"I don't quite know what you mean."

"Tell me how you can justify your way of behaving towards me."

"It is useless, but—I try to be gentle and courteous at all times. I anticipate your wishes. I treat you with consideration and deference before your friends. I give you all I earn. I try to fulfill my duty, as I see it, to you and to your father. I have done my best. If it does not satisfy you, I am sorry. I cannot improve upon it."

"What you say is all true, in a sense. You have been fair. But you show no feeling—not even when I try for hours to drive you frantic. Don't you know a woman of my temperament can never forgive that?"

A silence.

"I tell you I WILL get you in a rage some day."

"I hope not."

"Wouldn't you love to be rid of me if you could?"

"You have often asked me that. I answer as I always do:—I made to you, at a church altar, certain vows and pledges that I keep solely for the reason that they gave you the right to have them respected, and for no other. Those pledges I shall keep as long as you wish to have them kept. That is my idea of fairness."

"I will never give you a chance to leave me. No, if I hated you like death, I wouldn't. It would make me happy to think that I was keeping you from being happy with anybody else."

"You have expressed that sentiment frequently—both in speech and writing."

"Ah, yes, in my letters. Don't you love to get my letters, at your club, when you get to town?"

"I never comprehend why you write them."

"I can't bear the thought of your being so glad to get away from me. I know you have to go to town every week or the paper couldn't come out. By writing you long and severe letters, I keep you reminded of how brutal you are to me. You are such a vain creature when in town. I feel sure my letters do you good."

A silence.

"You never answer them, do you?"

"No."

"What do you think of them?"

"I am used to them. By the way, how did we begin, this time? I'm sure I've forgotten."

"I said you didn't care for me. You see, our talk began about you."

"Ah, yes, about nothing. Are you exhausted? I am."

"Will you take me rowing on the lake now?"

"Yes."

"Oh, how bad I've been! Will you forgive me?"

"Ya-yes."

DA CAPO AD LIB.

CHAPTER XLIII

A LESSON IN SELF-REPRESSION

Across the glass-smooth sheet of water that stretched away from the Major's Island, shot a needle-nosed cedar skiff. It danced along bravely, leaving a thin column of bubbles in its wake. The sculls were wielded, in workmanlike fashion, by a man in a bathing-suit, whose face, arms and legs were burned copper by persistent contact with a July sun. His feather, catch and pull showed the science of the practiced oarsman, and he was rowing as if it were an object.

It was the hour most delicious of all in those regions—not quite six in the morning—early enough for the sweet scent of the night to linger, and not so late that the sun has learned to play havoc with one's muscular ambitions. To right and left towered the mountains, silent as sentinels in the breathless hush of dawn; forward and backward stretched the bountiful, limpid blue. Not a breath of air stirring, and the only sound the twitter of birds in the trees at the foot of the hills.

The boat flew on. Propelled by long, rhythmical strokes, it made what a coach would call "corking time," and the Major's Island was soon a speck. Nay, it vanished altogether; for with a bend in the lake another island hid it from view, and then another, until the Major's Isle, in sooth, and its castle-full of deeply sleeping guests, became but a memory. Then, and then only, the solitary oarsman made a sharp turn and ran his skiff carefully to the rocky edge of one of the smaller islands. Stepping into the shallow water, he made the craft fast and went ashore, picking his way carefully over briar-roots and pine needles.

He was the only human being in that vicinity, though quite a mile away, over the water, there were sundry honest mountaineers, industriously trolling for the trout they would afterwards sell to patrons who paid them for being taken where the trout were not. Satisfied that he was quite secure from observation, the oarsman picked his way a few steps farther toward the centre of this island—which, like many others in the neighborhood, was only some two acres in extent—and entered a small, cleared space. At the edge of this space was the stump of a dead tree, perhaps five feet high, and indented and battered as if it had been to the wars. About the stump were lying twenty or thirty stones and rocks of various sizes, some of them weighing several pounds. These the explorer picked up carefully and carried, armful by armful, to a point fifteen feet away. Having collected all within easy reach, and satisfied himself, by a final glance toward all points of the compass, that he was not observed, he felt carefully of the muscles of his right arm. He then drew a long breath and commenced his devotions.

"Beast!" A seven-pound rock, hurled adroitly, and with the full force of a long gymnasium training, caught the stump fairly in the middle, and sent a shower of splinters flying. "You sweet ruffian! You unmitigated hyena!" With each gentle epithet a shot sped to its mark. "I have tried goodness, kindness, reason, with you," continued the attacking party, in tones of fury, now resting himself by

heaving two-pound rocks, instead of ten-pounders, "and yet there is not a minute of the day when you are not plotting for me the creation of some new variety of torment. Towser, Towser!—I call you Towser because it fits, though Heaven knows I've no right to insult an honest dog—I am kind and polite to you for twenty-three hours and three-quarters, Towser, because I owe you that for marrying you; but this other quarter is mine, Towser, so take that!" Another boulder went sailing home. "Enrage me, did you say, Towser? Oh, no! Nothing ever enrages me, but—well, what do you think of this, for a change this bright morning?—Blast you! Blast you! a thousand million blast you's! You —— —— —— ——!" A Mississippi pilot would have wept for bliss, and the bombardment of the doomed stump was continuous. "I am doing my duty"—slam!—"you worry and rag me for my very forbearance!!"—Whack!—"To perdition with you, you raving, nagging, besotted"—Bing!!!—"I know what's right and I'm doing it. I have my canker and I'll fight it, as the dear old Commodore said—fight it to the bitter death!"—Biff-Bung-Bang!!!!

The ammunition was gone, and the defenseless stump a sight. The author of the assault, trembling in every joint, and with the healthy perspiration starting from brow and neck and shoulders with the exertion, left the scene and found his way to a high rock at the deep side of the little isle. He was standing there in the sun, drawing deep, wholesome breaths and watching the far-off fishermen, when the early morning steamboat passed, giving him a kindly swell into which to plunge. What a world of satisfaction in that sturdy splash! And then a long, long swim, far out into the lake, a cool, sweet depth beneath, a sky overhead as blue as the tropics, and the world and its facts—for the moment at least—far away. One may forget much at such times.

On the miniature dock stood two extremely agreeable girls from Cincinnati—guests of Agnes Gaunt for some weeks. They dressed in white and had a habit of looking

happier than anyone on the Island. Said the younger to her sister: "I like Mr. Gaunt. He's so gallant to Agnes. He could not be more so if she were an empress."

"She must find it a relief after her father's swearing at her," laughed the elder, "I don't believe I've heard Mr. Gaunt swear; have you, Frank?"

"I am sure," declared "Frank," loyally and with conviction, "that Mr. Gaunt could not swear if he tried."

The subject of the discussion came darting up in his skiff and made an expert landing. The bathing-suit was *comme il faut* in that climate, and the virgins stood their ground. "What have you been doing to yourself, Mr. Gaunt?" asked one, "you look radiant."

"Light exercise and a clear conscience, my child," was the modest reply, "the two together make the worst of us cheerful."

"You never lose your temper, Mr. Gaunt. Is it because of this light exercise that you take every morning?"

"The light exercise that I take every morning, my dear young lady, enables me to be amiable all day."

Agnes Gaunt was seen coming down the path and the virgins fled with some precipitancy. The Major's daughter was attired with elegance and looked contrite.

"I have noticed," she said, "that no matter how despondent you are when you get up, you are always in better humor when you come back from your row. Do you think of nice things to say to me while you are away?"

"I rehearse them a little, yes."

"Repeat them now, won't you?"

"They're too sentimental."

"Do you think I'd be surprised if I knew what they were?"

"I am sure you would."

"Well, I'm glad you're feeling happy, because I've got a confession to make."

"A confession?"

"Yes. I did a rather shabby thing last night. When you were asleep in the hammock I went into the tent and tore

up two poems I found on your table. They were about beautiful women with classical names. I don't approve of your writing poems about beautiful mythical women. If you must write poems, write them about me."

"I wouldn't write them at all," said Gaunt, "only if I didn't, the paper would have to pay somebody else for writing them, and that's expensive. Let me see," he added, thoughtfully, "didn't I tell you that taking liberties with my manuscripts was the one thing I would not overlook?"

"Of course you did."

"Then why, may I ask, did you destroy my poems?"

"I was vexed with you for falling asleep when I had tried to and couldn't."

"Didn't it occur to you that I had been up until 3 o'clock the morning before, writing, and that I had also been writing steadily all the afternoon?"

"I don't care."

"Then I don't quite see why you made your 'confession.'"

"I had intended to say I was sorry, but to be frank with you, I now feel rather glad. You were looking much more good-natured, as you jumped out of that boat, than such a selfish person as you are has any right to look."

Gaunt turned to place his oars in a rack in the boathouse. He took from a peg a long bath-robe, wrestled himself into it and started up the path. Agnes Gaunt placed a hand on his arm. "Aren't you angry yet?" she demanded.

A smile and a bow preceded his reply: "By no means. I have no bad temper left. What business has anyone with evil temper on such a morning?"

"You act well," murmured the lady, "but in your heart I believe you would like to throw rocks at me."

"Oh, no," expostulated the figure in the bath-robe, enigmatically, "not twice in the same day."

"Waugh!" exploded the Major, with passion, from the top of the hill, "I want my chops."

CHAPTER XLIV

TO WHOM UNFAITHFUL

"DEAREST—MY WIFE:—Your letters reached me safely. They were sent to me from the Club, under cover, so you may free yourself from any anxiety as to their having caused trouble. I agree with you that it is best to write no more. I for my part cannot choose but remain silent after this; for I hold you, dear one, in such infinite esteem and reverence that the mere knowledge that our correspondence must be secret, clandestine, would be intolerable. It would be like placing you on a level with other women.

"And so, dear wife, I will say to-day, if you will let me, all that is to be said on this one little dismal tragedy in which we two are playing a part; and you must listen to each word and weigh it well, because it will be the truth, and the truth, sometimes, is good to know, in this lying world. And then, you know, there will be silence between us—a silence that 'may be for years and may be forever,' as the old song says. But you must feel in your heart, as I shall feel in mine, that not a day will go by—no, not an hour!—that will not see the passing of a precious thought, a sacred hope, through the distance, from me to you and from you to me. We may be both old and gray, mind you, and ready for the end of all things; but the thought will still be there.

"You need not tell me to be fair and honest in my present life. I could not think of you, and be less. The one injustice I did Agnes was to marry her. It was a grievous wrong—a crime, almost. To expatiate it by fidelity, by courtesy and consideration, is the least that I can do. I sometimes have an insane idea that by yielding her every tribute of the care and devotion to which she is entitled, I am atoning, in a way, for my behavior to you. Is that possible, I wonder—to pacify one's conscience for a wrong to

one woman by the rigid fulfillment of duty to another? It is a sorry notion, and one from which, as I need scarcely tell you, I derive but little comfort. . . . . She has her rights. They shall be hers to the end.

"Do not, I beg of you, construe me as claiming kinship with martyrs. Whatever the ordeal, I have the strength to endure it. 'Fight it,' said the brave old Commodore, 'to the bitter death.' Yes—I will. You, little one, who know now all that I feel for you, understand the torture of it, and when you have said—'be fair: be straight,' you know the battle is as good as won. Why, my dear, to merely know that you are in the same world with me—that your foot touches the same ground as mine—that you breathe, and eat, and sleep, as I do, is a happiness. To know that I have seen you, and that you do not forget, is a supreme and holy joy—a reward beyond price for any trifling distress of mind that I may be compelled to undergo. Strength, did I say? Dear, it is my very strength that sometimes exasperates me. My physical exercises have done much for me. They have given me back all my health, my clearness of perception and a sound set of muscles; and it seems maddening to think I can't use the muscle to tear and rip some sort of a possible situation out of impossible conditions. In the rare moments when I am alone—either on the water or in it—at which times I am least wretched—I think what a cruel mockery it is that I can't live with you as I am now—a dreamer at heart still, maybe, but at least a healthy-minded dreamer, with a body free from taint of coarse appetites, and in his mind a strongly developed sense of the seriousness of life. I think of myself as I once was—a mass of fastidiousness and vanity and indolence—and I wonder how you tolerated me even at my best. Then I grind my teeth and cry—gods! if I could only be with her—this way!' Then I tug harder at the oars and so gain a little peace. Again, I have an increased resource of forgetfulness in my writing, for they have dispensed with that jolly fat editor now, and I am doing his work and my own too, and I am kept busy. The Cynical

Paragrapher has gone also, and that means more toil for everybody.

"When I began this letter I tried to be wise, and fill it with discreet and sensible things. I find, instead, that I have been rambling and incoherent; and that, dear, is because, even as I write, the picture of our boy, as I last saw him, comes before me and confuses and blinds me. Singing there in the chancel, he seemed to belong to another world—a sweet, pure world in which I had no right or share—and I have thought, since so seeing him, how small a recompense a whole lifetime of worship seems for you, who gave him to me. I do not believe that in all the universe there is another child as beautiful as ours, Elaine, and whenever I think of you, and of him, I shut my eyes and try to recall a prayer. I have the photograph that you sent of him, in his surplice. It is in a safe place. When my resolution wavers, a sight of the picture brings it back. So then, my wife—ah, name most sacred and revered! as if two could claim it of me!—the way lies straight and clear. It is a hard way—a cruel way!—but you and I both believe it to be the right way, and follow it I will, aye, '*to the bitter death*'; for one of the mightiest lessons I have learned is—*that there is no peace in wrong*. So, I go on my way, and I hew to the line; but when I have done that much, each day, I claim that my penance is finished, and that for my reward I may hold in my heart, at night, secretly and sweetly, where not a soul may see, a love for you, 'firm as the hills and deep as the sea'—a love proud, defiant, supreme, everlasting. Is this a sin, I say, and if it is, will some wise man tell me how to escape it? I left you, when you willed it so, and married this woman; there was infidelity to you. I live with her and care for her now, because it is her right, and—all my heart and my life belong to you and to my son. There is infidelity, if you choose to call it so, to her. In God's name, some one tell me to whom I am now unfaithful!

"I drove last night through a most beautiful valley—a great shelving basin of fields, set in squares, like a chess-

board, bathed in moonlight and edged by the eternal hills. I was alone, and let my horses plod along slowly. Dear, do you know that in the beauty of that scene I had you alone—quite alone with me, for nearly an hour? It is always this way when I approach something that is very beautiful, whether it is some exquisite painting, noble and splendid—a haunting strain of music, or some wonderful evidence of God's own handiwork, like this valley. You step side by side with me into the marvel of it, and we worship it together, hand in hand, like children. So last night you walked with me through that peaceful valley, over the broad fields and along the silver brook, and I told it all to you again as I tell it to you now—how every memory of you is sacred and precious, and how you are dear to me in a thousand ways. Little wife, it is only in such dreams as this that I may draw near to you; but they give me the only taste of happiness that I shall ever know. For if I were to live a thousand years I should still thirst for and crave the one dear embrace that custom has endeared to me in ways that will not be forgotten—the one sanctified by every tie and charm of purity, and holiness and faith—the one that I, like a madman, once threw away! The embrace of the wife. Darling, was I not right when I told you the longing would last forever?

"So much for the lover. This much for the man:—Wife, good-bye. It may be that we shall meet; it may be not. In any case, know me as fair—as pledged to duty as long as the duty remains. I will write no more and you must not. Wait!—ah, yes, one thing more—this:

"It was a vain apology for a man who threw away your love for a shadow. It is a Man true and faithful and tried—faithful to the death—who loves you to-day and with all his soul—who would, if need be, die for you. E."

CHAPTER XLV

HOW A STORY WAS ENDED

The culmination came quite unexpectedly, while the Major's son-in-law was writing a novelette for the Major's quarterly. If, indeed, it had not been for the novelette, it might never have come about at all—on such trifling hinges do the doors of destiny swing. If the story had not been demanded by the printers in a given length of time, and if that demand had not produced in the writer a certain irritability of the nerves—but that is anticipating.

It was, in good truth, a very ordinary sort of story, neither very much better nor very much worse than others by which *The Fang* Company had profited, but the author was endeavoring, for some reason, to put into it work a little more conscientious than any he had previously attempted. He was trying to imbue his hero with some of his own pet foibles and principles—a reprehensible habit in any author—and making other characters serve as the mouth-pieces of declarations that would be understood by his friends. The depth, therefore, of his interest in his task was only equaled by his indisposition to suffer interruption during its performance.

The argument is made by some very able judges that it is impossible to write acceptably for a living without the possession of a tranquil mind. Eustace Gaunt disproved this every day. It is also held that quiet and harmony are essential to the successful accomplishment of literary feats. This theory he was also able to refute. The printers had been promised the "copy" at the rate of so much per day, and the presses were waiting for it. To fulfil such a promise, especially when the "copy" is fiction, is a strain to the violence of which any writer will testify, even when all the condi-

tions are fair; and Gaunt's satisfaction with the progress he was making was not at all enhanced by the inconsistent behavior of the Major. That cheery gentleman had a way of stampeding into the tent like a runaway colt, at any hour of the day, and bewailing loudly the thinness of the pile of word-covered sheets on the table, being quite oblivious to the fact that he had been fairly driven from it by the writer only sixty minutes before, at the end of a foolish fish story. "Well," he'd exclaim, "I see. I see. You'll never get it done, and the quarterly can't come out. Waugh! Fine chap you are to write a story!" "I could do it better," the victim would reply, "if you'd pay me for the three you've already published." Which was possibly true. This statement generally floored the Major—for quite sixty minutes. The printer, however, had been receiving the "copy" very closely to contract; the ardor with which he worked being perhaps the only influence that supplied the writer with any mental tranquility whatsover. The story was now almost done.

The day of the culmination was exquisitely fair—a day in late summer it was, balmy and beautiful. The event unfolded itself by easy stages, all of them more or less dramatic.

The Major's son-in-law was at work in his tent, shirt open at the throat, and sleeves rolled up; a steadily increasing pile of manuscript at his elbow, and a heap of corrected proof-sheets on the floor. He had outlived a night containing some deplorable incidents; also an interruption that came just after breakfast, from Agnes Gaunt, who called at the tent to ask if he would forgive her for her share in them and to announce, immediately upon his replying in the affirmative, that it concerned her very little whether he did so or not. He was proceeding, nevertheless, at a fair rate of speed, when there was heard a crunching of the gravel, and the Major's broad figure loomed in the fork of the tent. The writer's wits spun around in a sickening fashion. He spoke not, but laid down his pen resignedly and waited.

The Major looked unamiable. There was not a vestige of affection or jollity in his manner as he addressed his son-in-law. "Eustace," he said, in a most business-like voice, "I wish you'd give me your serious attention for a minute."

"Major," replied the other, dutifully, but with decision, "I will; but don't blame me if I'm short on the batch of copy by to-day's boat."

"Pshaw!" hissed the Major, with a contemptuous wave of his hand at the proofs, "there's more important game afoot than that rubbish."

"One wouldn't think it rubbish, the way you and your infernal printers keep me at it."

"I know all that. But the story can wait. Now listen."

The Major sat down on a campstool and talked for perhaps twenty minutes. In that time there was visible no trace of the frankness and enthusiasm of manner so familiar to his family and friends. Instead, he talked swiftly, coldly and to the point, measuring his words with precision and pointing his argument with the dexterity of an able advocate. He kept his eyes fixed, most of the time, on the pole in the middle of the tent, but shot at his son-in-law, at intervals, alert, analytical glances. As his words fell from his mouth, he studied their effect on his auditor, and when he had finished, he leaned back, awaiting an answer.

The Major's argument had been cleverly put. It had contained—a proposition.

It was quite two minutes before Gaunt answered. When he did so, he spoke deprecatingly, but with spirit. "Major," he said, "the proposition you have just laid down involves a principle. You propose to castigate an individual who has, I admit, been guilty of a grave offense, and deserves all the punishment he can get or you bestow. It is nevertheless, a fact, is it not, that this individual doesn't advertise?"

"Well?" interjected the Major, quite icily. No "waughing" now.

"Simply this," replied Gaunt; "I have told you before and I tell you again that I will never soil my hands with any such

business. You claim, Major, that your are actuated by high moral motives in wishing to punish this man's wrong-doing —that his failure to advertise has nothing to do with the case. Let me ask you, Major: If this man were an advertiser—a heavy one—would you then wish to expose his wrong-doing?—if he were to come to you and offer you an advertisement, would you still consider that the public morality demanded his exposure?"

The Major's look was altogether bitter. "How painfully moral you are!" he sneered.

"I'm not, Major," protested his son-in-law fervently, as though that accusation were in itself a disgrace, "but as far as I've gone in journalism, I've kept my hands clean. You're welcome to the best work—and all of it—that I can do, when it's straight work; but I won't help you to bully anybody—I'll be shot if I will! I don't believe you would if you thought it over. Would you, Major?"

The tone of semi-appeal in the question was lost. The Major looked disappointed, and wholly unsympathetic. He left at once, but turned to say a little vindictively: "Virtuous young man! What a pity you didn't begin sooner. Your books"—another wave at the proofs—"sell well, no doubt, but we don't live on them altogether."

There was a significance in the words, whether real or counterfeit, that caused an abrupt cessation in one novelist's labor. To the rigmarole of other fantastic thoughts crowding that busy brain was added a dread that brought on an actual fit of shivering. What if the money he had been earning from *The Fang* all these years were tainted, every dollar of it, with the flavor of specific unfairness? He knew the paper's scandalous character, and the stigma that attached itself to every member of its regular staff, but this was his first contemplation of the idea that there might be anything sadder connected with its operations. Why, if the paper's policy were one of mere coercion, he was indebted to that coercion, and not to his hard, undeviating work

as writer and editor, for his house-rent, for his clothes and Agnes Gaunt's—yes, for the very bread they ate. Horrible! Horrible! He got up and paced the floor of the tent, trampling heedlessly on the proof-sheets. Still, could it be true, after all? *The Fang* had an enormous circulation—a large, legitimate revenue there. It had good advertising patronage the year round. *But how was that advertising secured?* Whew! There came the sledgehammer thought again; and in sheer weariness the brain turned to other matters, possibly more disquieting. Last night's episodes—pish! were they not the episodes of all the nights? Why think of them at all? Had the Major really gone, and had he any idea how he had disturbed him? He was conscious, somehow, that his head ached. Whirr-r-r-rrr! went the wheels within it again, and he descended to a recollection of a waiting printer in New York and only 2,000 words of "copy" done. He took up his pen, glancing, as he did so, at his watch. Twelve o'clock. The boat did not go until three and there was still two hours till the mail closed. Slowly the lines of words began forming themselves again on the paper. In labor, that one and blessed relief, the brain was restored to tranquillity once more. He wrote steadily for perhaps a quarter of an hour and then—

A light but familiar step on the gravel without. He tried to look immune, but failed and turned sallow through his sunburn instead.

"Eustace," said Agnes Gaunt, firmly, from the fork of the tent, "I have come to have an understanding with you."

Somehow the man seemed uncertain of himself to-day. His knuckles were burrowing into the pad of paper before him and he spoke as if his teeth were loose. "Would you mind waiting until after luncheon," he managed to ask. "I have not made much progress with the book to-day."

"One would think that story was the most important thing in the world."

"Nobody does. It would not be missed if it were pitched

into the lake. Only I've promised the printers to have it done at a certain time and I want to make the promise good."

"Well, stop now and talk to me."

"I can't possibly catch up if I do. I'm a long way behind now, and the thing should be done by to-morrow. If the quarterly were not to appear on the newstands in time, it would mean a serious loss."

"You've explained all that many times."

"Then don't you understand?"

"Yes, but I don't care."

"What is it you wish to say now?"

"That I want you to treat me decently. I know you wish I were dead, but you never did love me and you know it."

Great ferocity inspires great calmness. Gaunt answered, perhaps, in tones as even as any he had ever used in his life.

"I will stop work now, since you desire it," he said, "only I will beg you, as you value—*anything*—"not to disturb me this afternoon. I do not think I can answer for—for my health—if you do."

"You are trembling," declared Agnes Gaunt, as they walked to the house together. "Perhaps you've a chill. Doesn't it make you think of Florida?"

"It does," replied Gaunt.

At luncheon he felt constrained and unnatural. There was the usual jumble of thoughts in his head, but there was also a sensation of tightening—a feeling that the world was going too fast and that he could never catch up. Also, curiously enough, there was the idea of a relief—the relief that a prisoner feels when confronted with the knowledge that a verdict of some sort, whether of life or death, is about to be reached, after a long and tedious trial. He listened, without hearing it, to the conversation of the guests, the lisping of the virgins, the droll stories of the army men—and missed the chronic cackle and the divided teeth of Miss Dearthing, who for some reason was in town that week and not of the house-party. Things looked unnatural and be-

fogged. He caught himself several times staring rather vacantly at the woman whom he had accompanied to an altar, and as he did so experienced a difficulty in swallowing his food. And all the time there was buzzing—buzzing in his head the persistent triangle of wheels; a surpliced choir-boy astride of one, joyously carolling psalms; a tent-fork with an angry woman in it decorating, medallion-fashion, the face of another, and wrapped round the third the form of an automaton printer, impatiently barking for "copy."

Then, in due time, the boat went on its way with that day's batch, and, peace still reigning in the tent, the composition of the next (and last) day's was begun. Mr. Eustace Gaunt was passing, at this time, though he was unaware of it, through a climax of mental turmoil that for some men means emancipation; for others, collapse. He owed the preservation of his equilibrium (though he was ignorant of that, too) to his persistent athletic training, the great physical strength that he now possessed serving to control his mental and nervous forces. He had reached a point, as he thought, where mental disquiet could affect him no further. His error was one of judgment. It was his capacity for endurance, not his capacity for feeling, that was exhausted. And from the mistake, odd things came to pass.

It might be fair to the Major to say that he supplied the last straw but one.

His son-in-law's story was in its final chapter when the Major came stamping up the gravel to the tent. A writer engaged upon his last chapter is never in the best of humor. When Eustace Gaunt heard that gravel crunching he ceased to have any humor. He laid down his pen and closed his eyes. The wheels were buzzing again. He went so far as to pray for self-control.

The Major was in an unusual mood. "I don't want to hear any rot about your not wanting to be interrupted, Eustace," he announced, noisily, "because what I've come to say is very important. I dislike to say it, but my duty as a father—"

Here was a new sensation. Nothing of the kind had the Major ever attempted before. In the son-in-law, homicidal mania was replaced by curiosity. Still, he felt panicky and light-headed. He looked past the Major, beyond the tent-flap, and saw some golden-rod waving. It looked red as blood.

"My duty as a father," pursued the Major, with much pomposity, "won't permit me to remain silent. I have come to expostulate with you, Eustace, upon your unkind treatment of Agnes. Waugh."

The feebleness of the "waugh" was due to the Major's absorption of the look in the younger man's eyes. It was a look of absolute stupefaction.

Profound silence reigned for a moment, in which Gaunt recalled, like a flash, the dead Commodore's estimate of the Major's methods, in their chat at the Athletic Club.

"*He will impose on you to the very last degree, knowing that he is doing so, and then, just at the moment he sees he has gone beyond your endurance and that you are about to rebel, he will come at you slap-bang, with an accusation of the precise wrong,*" &c., &c.

And there stood that miraculous old man facing him—subdued, in a measure, by his look, but palpably unashamed.

So the son-in-law stared and stared. He made two vain efforts to speak, and then, realizing their impotence, burst into a roar of laughter that woke up the hotel-keepers on the mainland and scared the very crows among the crags. It was not so much a roar as a howl, for it lacked breadth and sonority, but it swelled and grew in volume, until the Major, from sheer infection, began to chuckle, too. He checked himself, on noticing that his son-in-law, however hard he might laugh, looked serious as a judge, even while his jaws were agape and the top of his head tilting. There is nothing more depressing than this solemn laughter. Its solemnity saves it from being hysterical. Gaunt was far from hysterics, but quite overcome, nevertheless. When convinced that his son-in-law could not stop laughing as

long as he remained there. Major Plum retired, looking thoughtful, but unconverted.

For quite half-an-hour after he had gone, the author of that classic romance "Gyves that Gall," sat in his chair immovable, except for the attacks of disconsolate laughter that returned now and again to shake him. During this time he scratched absently on the table with his finger-nails and stared steadily past the tent-flap, at the swaying golden-rod, with eyes that failed to see it. Then, all at once, his fist was swung through the air and came down with some violence against his forehead, after which he set to work steadily, with a grunt of satisfaction, and made good progress. For two hours the lines reeled themselves off cleanly and regularly, and the white pages steadily increased; every one of them, to the author's eyes a work of art—you have had that feeling, have you not, you writers?—and the hero's fate was nearly settled and tranquillity restored, when—

Down came, if you please, the last straw. It was supplied by the chatelaine of the Island.

"How dare you," demanded Agnes Plum Gaunt, "insult my father?"

Gaunt looked up sharply. He saw but two things—a face, and some swaying golden-rod behind it, equally red. The triangle of wheels in his cranium split, and the fragments seemed to fly out of it. His action was peculiar, for a sane man. He gave a very loud shout, and, averting his eyes and holding both hands extended before him, as though to shut or push away something, he bolted from the tent outright. He brushed roughly against the figure standing there, but did not wait to apologize. He flew like a college sprinter across the lawn and down the path to the boathouse. His pace was that of a man flying from the actual commission of a murder rather than from the mere temptation to commit one. It was so rapid, indeed, that he lost his balance before reaching the dock and slid down the last few rods of the path headforemost, soiling his duck trousers

ridiculously. In three or four minutes he was into his rowing shirt and pushing off in the skiff. By that time Agnes Gaunt was standing on the dock. She began a speech of a sort to which he had grown accustomed.

When she had finished, he himself used some inelegant language, finishing with—"if you don't go away from here, as I live I'll brain you." As he said this, he stood erect in the boat, holding an oar aloft in both hands. He had the aspect of one who will make good his threat. Agnes Gaunt's expression, as she ascended the hill, was one of mystification and respect.

He rowed, possibly, for three miles, with long, vigorous strokes, without a pause or a slackening, tearing his blades through the water, feathering lightly and staring like a mummy at the vanishing Island. His lips were white and set and his breath labored. When he could row no longer, he let fall the sculls and dropped his head forward on his bare arms, as they rested on his knees, and remained in that attitude a long time.

When he looked up, it had grown dusk, and he found himself saying aloud, and in accents that some judges would have thought rather piteous—"God, oh God, let me save my reason!"

He had not prayed for some years, and the prayer that came disjointedly from his lips now might have been regarded by some persons as irreverent. He meant it in no such spirit. It certainly did not lack fervor. It was not all spoken, some of the missing words being supplied by thoughts. "Because, God," so this strange prayer ran, "you are a just and gracious God. As a child they taught me that and I have always believed it. Well, then, I've sinned, like a man, and the atonement, which I have tried to make as a man, has been bitter. Now, God, if there is an honest man's way out of this earthly hell, show it to me; or, if there is further sacrifice for me to make, show me that, and I'll make it; but—*God, oh God, spare me my reason!*"

Blasphemy in this prayer? Nay, surely not; for the voice

in which it was uttered was one of such entreaty as is rarely heard in gilded temples of the town. It was the plaint of a strong spirit bent and crippled with the weight of overmuch well-merited anguish, that was all.

But—"*this earthly hell?*" Surely the man must have been daft; for when the moon came up, as it did presently, and lit the placid water, the scene was of Fairyland once again. He rowed back slowly, slowly, and across his mind swept the miasma of a long year's hopeless combat with the impossible. The sorry bickerings, the petty complaints, the days of nervous unrest and the nights of even graver trial—all the dire catalogue of miseries that live in a house where love is not; the perpetual feasting and noise, the querulous discontent, the persistent ignoring of his own efforts toward toleration and peace—all these things came upon him now with crushing weight; yet not so crushing, withal, as the knowledge that he had finally permitted himself, for the first time in his entire life, to address words and threats of violence to a woman. The shame of that thought, perhaps, was bitterer than any that had preceded it; and when his mood became calmer—a change for which the beauty of the night was responsible—his regret was so deep that he was prepared to make amends for the lapse. The languor consequent upon his violent exercise brought a grateful dullness to his brain.

As he neared the Island, the sound of other oars attracted his attention. Not twenty feet away another boat passed him. Faithful "Old Jack Potts" was hard at work, his nose sinking between his knees at every stroke, and in the stern sheets his master and mistress, Mr. and Mrs. Lighthouse, too busy, what with circling arms and fond whisperings, to see anyone. They had been to the Island and were on their way home to their own nest on the hillside, amidst the morning glories and the honeysuckle. Married ten years and lovers by moonlight still, oblivious of the witnessing of the faithful serf. Oh, what a contrast to some wedded lives! Go, then, Sunbeam and Bear, to your den, and may all the

gods go with you and continue teaching you to show an exquisite example in imperishable affection to folk less blessed than yourselves.

As Gaunt landed and changed his dress, he felt in a vague way that his trials were done, but could not have told why. But in the first place, conscious of having been guilty of a coarse action, he sought Agnes, with the intention of proffering an apology. It was neither expected nor desired. In the main hall of the Island Castle, there was a gay company assembled, and much merriment afoot. The array of fluttering girlhood was at its fairest, the Major at his noisiest and best and Agnes Gaunt, to all seeming, overwhelmingly happy. After one glimpse, the truant escaped to the veranda, where he was presently joined by the lady he had threatened to brain with the oar. "You have satisfied me at last," she exclaimed in triumph: "*I made you angry*—made you behave like a brute, didn't I?"

He went to his tent with a sense of having discharged an obligation. He lit a lamp there and went to work with some fierceness. The sounds of laughter and singing from the house did not disturb him, and when they finally died away he did not notice. It was perhaps 1 o'clock when he laid the last sheet down. The story of "Gyves that Gall" (the last that he was to write for Major Plum) was done. There was pleasure in the thought.

So wrapped was he in his reflections that he did not hear a light step on the gravel. He did, however, see the flap of the tent slowly drawn aside, in the gloom, and a hand and arm that he recognized come through the aperture. He was surprised, but said nothing. The hand moved. It sent flying towards the table, with a swift jerk, a light object that looked like a piece of cardboard, and then there was a patter of feet down the path, and a laugh—not a musical laugh.

The object, whatever it was, had fallen at his feet. He picked it up and looked. And then and there, another story was done.

It was his son's photograph. It had been stolen in some way from its hiding-place. The white surplice and the hands holding the hymn book, were untouched. The face had been defiled.

He went outside the tent and stood on the ledge of rock looking towards the house. Raising his arms above his head, he drew a long, deep breath and muttered some indistinguishable words. His expression was that of one who has been absolved.

Still holding the picture in his hand, he almost danced down the declivity to the lake's edge—a wild spot, the farthest point from the house. Here in the brush, close to the rocks, there was a fine bed of dry pine needles, and here he lay down, very happily and comfortably, to enjoy the best night's sleep he had ever known on the Island. "Billy," he whispered, very foolishly, to the photograph, just before dropping off, "we'll bunk here to-night, you and I, and to-morrow, boy, we'll go."

He made, the next day, his usual preparations for going to town. The picture-throwing incident was spoken of by no one. Crossing to the steamer dock, in the launch, he looked at the mountains, at the bay, at the quaint village of Hilltown, with a curious interest, but without affection. The Major, who was not going to New York that day, came across with his "children," as he still called them, in the launch, and just as his son-in-law was about to board the boat, he said to him: "By the time you come back, my boo-oo-oo-oy, I hope things will go—waugh!—more smoothly."

Gaunt glanced at the launch dancing away over the water, with Jerry, the man, in the stern and Agnes Gaunt on the cushions amidships. Agnes Gaunt had a smart yachting cap, which she was waving.

"Major," announced the "boo-oo-oo-oy," with joy in his voice, "I am never coming back."

The Major's expression changed suddenly and totally.

"Do you mean that?" he asked sharply. He did not say "my boo-oo-oo-oy" this time.

The steamer was casting off. Gaunt stepped aboard. "Major," said he, "I do."

And Agnes Gaunt still waved the yachting cap.

CHAPTER XLVI

A SURPRISE

During the week that followed, which he passed in New York, Gaunt applied himself, with all the energy at his command, to the preparation of the current issue of *The Fang*. The retirement of the former editor, and his own accession to the duties of director, had increased his burden of work in no small degree and into this he plunged, in these last days, with an ardor that under the circumstances was amusing. He had in his mind no clear idea of what was about to transpire, in his relations with Major Plum and that gentleman's daughter; but he was possessed, nevertheless, by the sense of impending relief, or escape. He was resolved, in no matter what manner, to retire from a situation that had finally proved unendurable, but no plan of any sort looking to that end occurred to him. He expected and was prepared for any form of conflict or scandal, and was indifferent to either. He knew that nothing could be done until an understanding of some sort had been reached with the Major, and in behalf of that gentleman and his kindred he was prepared to make any concession or sacrifice—except one involving the maintenance of their present relationship. So that the situation, much relief as it had brought him, was one of suspense, and it was to escape this that he busied himself in brightening the last issue of the paper that he intended to oversee.

It was superb late summer weather, and after the long,

hard days in the office he spent evenings and nights of eagerly sought solitude, adroitly dodging friends and business associates and dining at the Casino or Tavern, in the Park, and trying vainly to think out some solution of the vexing problem confronting him. On securing freedom in some way he was absolutely bent; and it was his resolution to this effect—a resolution justified, so he considered, by all the facts—that gave him an elation difficult, at times, to control. When in such a mood the Park was a delightful lounging-place. The clubs were deserted and the Avenue a desert waste, but it was cool and restful in the green drives, and the sight of the gay parties in the restaurant verandas helped to make reflection pleasant. And when the glasses were tinkling, and the blithe Hungarian minstrels thrumming and the lights from flying vehicles flashing through the trees, the thought would come of the misery and desolation and hopelessness of a year before, and of the winter that followed; a memory that now almost seemed like a joke. Of such wondrous power is the charm of hope.

Then, his modest meal ended, this lonely wayfarer in the big town's breathing-spot strolled through the glades, his sweet phantom Hope his only company and the cooing couples in his path a pleasant mockery of his own condition. Afterward, alone in his apartment in the Boulevard, he sat at the open window and smoked until far into the night, or executed, upon his piano, weird and interminable improvisations that caused the people on the floor above to wish him dead.

On the Thursday there came to him from Agnes Plum Gaunt a letter like those to which he had grown accustomed, but containing matter of a kind likely to prove of value to a person opposed to her in a legal controversy. It was intemperate in some places and incoherent in more. It reached Gaunt at the office. He made no attempt to answer it, but was engaged, at 9 o'clock that night, in his library, in reading it for the second time, when the doorbell rang sharply.

As the only tenant of the apartment, the servants being with the rest of the family in the mountains, he answered the ring himself. To his surprise, Miss Dearthing floated into the hallway.

She was tastefully attired, as usual, and somewhat out of breath. "Eustace," she said, amiably, but with a heavy sigh, "I hope you won't mind. I was passing and I—I felt a little faint. I saw a light, so I came in. I may rest awhile, may I not?"

Now no man, however much he may dislike beauty, can expel beauty in distress. When the Major and Agnes were in town, this lady was a frequent guest at the apartment, and it would have been gross inhospitality to decline to succor her now.

"Come into the library," invited her host, civilly; "I'll see if I can find you some of the Major's advertising-contract champagne."

When he returned with the bottle and a goblet, Miss Dearthing was standing with her back towards him, fumbling with the letter that had been thrown on the table. When she heard him coming she stepped aside, with an agility surprising in a sick person. Her tone, too, was airy when next she spoke.

"Letter from Ducks, I see," she observed, as she sipped the wine. "Lucky fellow! What a lot she writes."

The remark, and the tone in which it was delivered, exercised an immediate change in the sentiment of her entertainer. An instant before, he was prepared to relieve the distressed damsel. He felt now that he would be very grateful if she went away.

Miss Dearthing saw the change in his face, and her very red lips parted, showing the divided teeth. "Eustace," she announced, entirely without regret, "you don't like me, do you?"

"To be quite honest, I don't."

"It's rather funny," pursued the young woman musingly,

"and I'm sure I don't understand it. Most men like me, you know. The Major does."

"Yes," acquiesced Gaunt, "I'm sure he does."

The wine was having a good effect. The visitor seemed quite recovered. "You've never liked me," she insisted, "I knew you never would, ever so long ago—that day I asked you to go fishing and you asked me to go to the devil. Eustace, you look as if you'd like to repeat that invitation now."

"Do I?" This absently.

"Yes, you do. I say, Eustace, what will you bet I can't tell you what's in Ducks' letter?"

"I don't want to lose my money," was the calm response, "I saw you reading it."

"Why, Eustace Gaunt!" The divided teeth gleamed again.

"Do you feel better now?" This without concern.

"I suppose that's an invitation for me to go," pouted the damsel, with prettily affected mortification, "but before I do I insist on having another glass of champagne. You temperance people are so stingy."

She seated herself sideways on the table, first holding her glass at arm's length and then draining it with much ostentation. This to Gaunt was a rather surprising performance, as he had never before known Miss Dearthing to be so demonstrative under like conditions. He did not notice that she kept her eyes turned toward the window, which was unprotected by anything in the way of a shade.

When she had finished she hopped lightly to the floor. Her second glass, after all, had been but a pretty counterfeit of tippling, for it was not half emptied. She crossed over to the window and after peering out of it for a moment, exclaimed excitedly, "Eustace, come here—quick!"

Ninety-nine persons out of a hundred will obey such a behest, regardless of who makes it. Gaunt did so promptly. Miss Dearthing grabbed him in a kittenish way by the scruff

of the neck and pulling his head to a level with her own, cried, still in excitement, "look—look!"

"At what?" contemptuously demanded her captive, wriggling himself free.

"Only a falling star," answered the young lady coolly, stepping away from the window. She had seen a man on the opposite side of the street make an entry in a note-book and walk hastily away, and she seemed satisfied. She was smiling so amiably that her teeth seemed farther apart than ever.

"Have some more wine before you go," urged Gaunt; "better finish the bottle."

"Before I go!" repeated the lady reproachfully, "that shows how anxious you are to be rid of me."

When she had gone, Gaunt opened the window wide and smoked out of it. He knew that the attack of faintness had been assumed, but was at a loss to account for the visitation.

So the remaining time flew. He had a glorious day of it Sunday, going to church in the morning like a Christian and up the Hudson in a catboat in the afternoon like a heathen. He had with him on the latter excursion a victim in the form of a fledgeling musical critic, a tender stripling who delighted him by showing symptoms of heart failure when the stiff breeze caused the craft to bury her slanting side in the ripples, but who outlived his fright and joined him in sundry boisterous nautical songs as they came careering down with the tide, towards midnight. Then, on the morrow, it seemed as if the whole atmosphere had cleared without explanation. Instinct was whispering secrets so fast no mind could keep them lucidly on record; and that sprightly phantom, Hope, was assuming, still without visible reason or excuse, the proportions and outlines of actuality.

He reached the office early. He knew that with the arrival of the Major there would be drama, or comedy, of some sort, and he was not disappointed.

The Major came in a little before 9 o'clock, and the man-

ner of his entrance was sufficiently original or unusual to transfix with astonishment the entire office force, including the corps of female stenographers. Instead of bouncing in like an overgrown schoolboy, exploding "waughs" and scattering furniture and cats, the Major stood for a moment on the threshold, poising himself on his heels, head up, eyes front and right hand buried in the breast of his seemly black frock coat. Then, without speaking to anyone, he advanced slowly, with long, dipping strides, like those of Sir Henry Irving in "Hamlet;" contriving, at the same time, to clothe his features in a mask of solemnity so dismally sepulchral that the advertising manager looked on in alarm and the stenographer with the gratuitous teeth refrained with difficulty from hysterics. Seating himself heavily at his desk, the Major leaned back in his chair, folded his hands and sighed profoundly at the ceiling.

His son-in-law emerged from his inner den and pointed to the heap of letters on the tablet of the desk. "Good morning, Major," he said civilly, "anything in that lot for me?"

The Major sat up straight, looking at the younger man as if convinced he had met him at some time, but could not quite remember where. Suddenly, however, his hands went up before his face, palms outward, in the gesture that very good men employ to ward off some vague suggestion of impropriety. Still, he did not look his son-in-law in the eyes.

The office force of *The Fang* was deeply interested, as usual. The novelty of the scene exercised a fascination there was no resisting. For the life of him Gaunt could not remain serious.

"I asked you, Major," he laughed, "if you had any mail for me."

The Major seemed to partially awake from his dream. His face still wore the expression of dazed mystification, but he dropped his hands and began turning over the stack of letters. He picked up a square envelope gingerly between his thumb and forefinger and handed it over. "This," he

said, "is for you." The tone was that of the parson when he says, "Dust to dust." Back the Major leaned again and sighed at the ceiling once more.

The envelope was thin and flexible. Obviously, it contained but one sheet. The address was in the handwriting of Agnes Gaunt. The recipient went back with it to his own desk and read:

MR. EUSTACE GAUNT:

I will never live with you again under any conditions or circumstances.

AGNES PLUM GAUNT.

There were at this time several persons in the editorial rooms—an assistant or two, an office boy, and black Mag, the scrubwoman. Before these it was necessary to preserve composure. The task was difficult.

The sight of this brief scrawl sent to the heart and brain of the man who read it so magnificent and stunning a joy that every muscle of his body quivered and the tears sprang to his eyes. Staring straight in front of him he rose slowly from his chair, crumpling the letter in his hand, and then turned, in sheer self-defence, to stare out of the window. Of the street or the Square or the surrounding buildings he saw nothing. All things were blank save the knowledge that the fetters had been loosed.

Some of his old insouciance came to his aid. He felt that he could not look the Major in the face without shrieking; but he excused himself to his associates with self-possession, and went out, remarking that he had business elsewhere.

CHAPTER XLVII

THE MAJOR'S EMOTIONS

He fairly raced from the building, out into Broadway. The street was brilliant with sunshine, and thick with the usual hurrying hordes. He had no idea in view except to keep moving. Without that, it seemed impossible to preserve his senses.

Joy!—joy, fierce, greedy and overwhelming. Such joy as a drowning sailor feels when his feet touch the sand in the darkness and he had thought land miles away. Such joy as criminals know when reprieved, or miners when released from a black, living tomb long after giving up hope. Joy keener because of the knowledge that it was right and just. He had made his fight firmly and fairly—stood his ground to the final demand of duty—stood it till shown beyond doubt that such duty was a mockery and decency unavailing—and then, when casting about blindly for some means of release, here was release offered him—yes, thrust upon him, whether he would or no. And this after he had satisfied the last exaction of conscience in his demeanor toward the woman he had wronged but once—and that by marrying her! It was too wonderful to believe.

His youth came back with a rush. All the hopes and ambitions, the clean thoughts and aims that had been tarnished by years of indolence and indulgence, flashed again into life. He almost danced up the street—danced along like a colt, with Te Deums in his heart and steel springs in his legs.

Where he walked for the next two hours he never remembered, but men and women whom he knew viewed him with surprise as he passed, remarking the almost riotous jubilation that shone from his face. In Forty-second Street, near

the old reservoir, he was stopped by a bright and hardheaded girl of twenty-five, somewhat famous in society as the former sister-in-law of a very graceless young scamp. That is, she did not exactly stop him; the bull-pup she was leading by a strap—a weakness of many New York girls of otherwise even mental balance—entangled himself absurdly in her feet, so that she was compelled to stop. "Mr. Gaunt," she exclaimed, flashing her pink cheeks at him, "what on earth have you done to yourself? Last winter I vowed you were going to die; this morning you look like a runaway schoolboy." The sprinter was able only to shake hands, mumble some unintelligible greeting and dash on, but his pleasure was ludicrously out of proportion to the importance of the incident. She was a nice girl, he reflected, even if she did persist in leading a cannibalistic bull-terrier about by a string; and he found, as he retraced his steps, that the mere act of speaking to someone had quieted his nerves and restored his train of reflection to something like an even channel. Still, he could not rid his mind of the impression that the whole world had suddenly been changed to a playground in which to frisk and frolic. He caught himself itching to execute jig-steps in time to an Italian's hurdy-gurdy or join with a lot of laughing boys and girls in trundling hoops in a cross-street.

When he returned to the office Major Plum was still there. The Major was dictating, loudly and pompously, to a stenographer, but ceased as his son-in-law came in, and resumed his former funereal solemnity of manner. Gaunt walked briskly into the inner room that had formerly been his own. It was empty. Stepping back a moment he politely asked the Major if he could give him the privilege of a brief private conversation.

The old warrior entered the little room slowly, closing the door behind him, and seating himself beside the editorial desk. It required no second glance at his face to determine that he intended to act a part.

"I presume, Major," began his son-in-law, showing him a letter, "that you are aware of the contents of this."

The Major glanced at the crumpled sheet and covered his eyes with his hand. His shoulders heaved.

"Of course," continued the younger man briskly, and quite without emotion, "that's a detail. I called you in here primarily to offer you my resignation, now and forever, as a member of the editorial staff of *The Fang*."

"My boo-oo-oo"— The Major checked himself. "I regret," he answered, with profound sadness, "that your conduct forces me to accept it."

"My conduct? What conduct?" The question was asked sharply.

"The misery you have caused me this summer," replied the Major, sepulchrally, "has brought me to the verge of the grave."

The situation was too tragic for laughter. Gaunt rose from his seat and paced the length of the room twice, nervously. Rage—utter rage against this old man's monumental masquerading deprived him of power to think. He stopped suddenly and spoke:

"Major, I won't say that you and I have never understood each other. There have been times, I think, when we have understood each other. I will say, rather, that you have persisted in trying to be misunderstood. You are trying to make me misunderstand you now."

"Oh, Eustace, what do you mean?" almost sobbed the Major.

"Heavens, man!" stormed Gaunt, losing his manners in his exasperation, "I mean for one thing that you madden and disgust one by your perpetual shamming of emotions that you do not feel. There has arisen, as you know, a certain crisis in our relations. I wish to be frank and open and honest with you in stating my position. Will you be equally frank, cease your bad acting and discuss matters sensibly for five minutes, as sensible men may, or shall we leave the adjustment of our affairs altogether to lawyers?"

"My bo-oo-oo———Eustace," protested the old gentleman, silencing the tremolo stop in his vocal organ before this castigation, "why do you get so angry with me?"

"Because, Major, you persist in trying to be melodramatic and succeed only in being ridiculous. What on earth do you mean by my 'conduct,' and the 'misery' it has caused you?"

"Your ingratitude has broken my heart."

"Your heart, Major," interrupted Gaunt—and paused. He realized that this was no time for play of satire, and after a full minute's silence, addressed the older man gravely and gently:

"Major Plum, there are some few things that ought to be said, and I might as well say them now. I will not ask you to be sincere with me, because you can't be sincere—don't interrupt me, please, Major—but I'll make my statement as brief as possible. I entered your family under circumstances that need not be mentioned now. Having entered it, I did my duty as a man and a gentleman, in fulfilling the obligations I had assumed. During such time as I have been your son-in-law my fidelity to your daughter and to yourself has been rigid. I will not say I have been happy, because you know I have not been happy. You yourself know, best of all, the conditions under which I have labored and you know that I have not failed in one atom of my obligations either to you or to Agnes. Therefore, Major, I will not allow you to insinuate that this impending separation is due to any misconduct of mine."

"Then," interjected the Major, a suspicion of acrimony creeping into his tones in spite of him, "what did you mean by telling me, when you left the Lake, that you were never coming back?"

"Precisely what I said, Major. I had reached the decision then that the life I was leading was intolerable. I did not propose to tolerate it."

"And that's your idea of duty?"

"There are limits to the possibility of performing some duties. I had reached such a limit."

"In so deciding, you were guilty of both ingratitude and dishonesty."

"Possibly. I do not think so. Having formed a blasphemous and impossible marriage, I paid the penalty for my wrong by accepting its consequences to the very dregs. Major, I have endured much from you. I have sunk my conscience while on your paper. I have worked hard for you and have waived the formality of pay. You have profited by my books—how handsomely I neither know nor care—that's of little consequence. I say to you now (for I may as well be frank if you won't) that there has not been a minute of the last year in which this alliance has not been a torture and a nightmare to me; but in spite of that fact, if there had not arisen some considerations impossible for me to bear or to name I would have gone on with it to the end. I would have stuck to it and swallowed my medicine, as a man should. Why? Because, as I say, I had no right to make this marriage in the first place. It was a farce and a sacrilege. Having made it, it was fair that I should abide by its results. I might have done so even longer, but this letter from Agnes shows that she is as desirous of the separation as I. Our personal feelings toward each other call for no comment. What more remains to be said?"

The Major had listened attentively to this harangue. "And what," he asked, at its conclusion, "do you intend to do?"

"I have scarcely had time to think yet," replied Gaunt. "Of course Agnes may have everything—though that isn't much—the contents of the house, and so on. We'll call what you owe me square, too. Give it to her."

The Major came to with a bounce. "Waugh!" he said. "Nothing of the sort! We'll have a cash settlement. I prefer it."

Gaunt smiled a little drearily. He was still a skeptic with regard to miracles. "You will remain in New York, I presume?" pursued the Major, whose display of grief was momentarily decreasing.

"No," was the answer, thoughtfully delivered. "I don't believe I shall. A separation must be arranged of course,

with all possible advantage to Agnes and with as little reflection as possible on either party. Whatever plan is decided upon I will do all in my power to facilitate."

At the word "separation" the Major had begun looking at his watch. He now grew palpably nervous. His grief had vanished.

"Where are you going now?" he inquired, in quite a friendly tone.

"Up-town," answered his son-in-law, rising, and reaching for his hat and stick. "Agnes may have the apartment, as it stands, if she wants it. The rent is arranged, I believe. I'll go up there now and get a few things I want. I shall be at the Athletic Club for a few days. It may be necessary that you and I talk further—if so, a telegram will catch me there. I shall not return here. There's a package of papers in that desk marked 'private' that I'll send for. Good morning, Major. There are some disagreeable formalities before us, but we might as well face them amicably, I am sure."

"Certainly," was the prompt reply, as the Major again looked at his watch; "but the money matter might as well be arranged at once."

"Not necessary," declared Gaunt; "I have all I need at present."

"But I insist," vowed the Major grandly. "Damn it, sir, I won't have any man leave me, and I in his debt. See here; it's now 12 o'clock. If you don't intend returning, go into 'Del's' at half-past 1 and I'll have Tom, the bookkeeper, meet you there with a statement and the cash."

"All right," agreed Gaunt. If there had lingered on his conscience any suspicion that he had dealt harshly by the Major in doubting the genuineness of his grief at the turn affairs had taken, it would have disappeared instantly, had he happened to catch sight of the old warrior's face as he passed from the room. It was a matter-of-fact face, a nineteenth-century face, a relentless, unscrupulous face. No gentle sentiment had place there. As the son-in-law editor left *The Fang* office for the last time, and stood in the hall

waiting for the elevator, he heard the Major at the telephone vociferously calling up the office of Messrs. Town & Trouble, lawyers, but thought nothing of the circumstance.

He succeeded in transferring himself to his club in plenty of time to keep the appointment at Delmonico's. He had just finished luncheon when "Tom" appeared.

The familiar scene, spirited even at that season, recalled the luncheon, on a far-off day, with McLaren—plump, jolly McLaren, who, with his gentle wife and his little ones, was now very happy somewhere in a foreign land—peace to him! What a marvelous chain of events had unrolled in that time, and yet here were the self-same figures that had been checked off and commented upon so epigrammatically by the sunny-tempered editor at that memorable repast: The venerable judge, the square-shouldered prize-fighter, the theatrical manager in arrears for royalties, the tailor, the languid-eyed men from the clubs. Yes, actually there was little Mr. Jakey Trouble himself, shining, bright star that he was, amid that constellation of celebrities, as though it were yesterday, and not years ago. Mr. Trouble's heels were as high, his cranium as polished, his clever little eyes as mischievous and penetrating as ever; but—

Here came "Tom."

The Major's bookkeeper was a pale youth who bore the appearance of being constantly overscolded and underfed. His manner was respectful.

"Sit down, Tom," said Gaunt, pleasantly; "you've some money for me, I believe."

The young man looked both embarrassed and gloomy. "A little," he replied. "I've brought a statement of account, too."

Gaunt took one glance at the paper that was handed him and laughed so loudly that the sleek waiter looked annoyed. His mood was so jovial that he had forgotten it was not correct to laugh in Delmonico's.

The "statement" was a curiosity. After duly crediting

the ex-editor of *The Fang* with the amount owing to him, which was rather large, it charged him with various items. There were cows for Florida; there were supplies for The Island; there was railroad transportation; there was this, that and the other, the whole footing up a debit so ruinous as to leave but a balance of some twenty-odd dollars. For this the Major had written his check.

"The Major said," murmured the youth, with a shifty look about him, "that if you'd sign this statement I was to give you the check."

"All right, Tom," laughed Gaunt happily. "Only," he added, as he initialed the paper, "I'm at a loss to see why the Major went to the trouble of this formality, when I offered to give him the whole thing."

He was enlightened in a somewhat startling way. The pallid "Tom," his "statement" duly signed and pocketed, had barely reached the door when a dapper young man, of stocky build and not unpleasing features, stepped up. "This is Mr. Gaunt, I believe," was his greeting.

Gaunt bowed and bestowed upon the newcomer the stare with which he was accustomed to reward an intrusion by a stranger.

"I beg a thousand pardons," urged the latter courteously, "but there is an important reason for my speaking with you. May I take a chair?"

Gaunt nodded. There was no rebuking such politeness.

The young man bent forward across the table, still cumbered as it was with the finger-bowl and coffee. "Mr. Gaunt," he murmured softly, and looking down at the cloth, "I am sorry to say I have some papers that I must serve on you."

"Papers!" repeated Gaunt, in tones of annoyance and disgust. "What papers? I don't understand. You must really excuse me." He turned to summon the head waiter.

"Sir," said the other, nervously, and turning a little white, "I beg you will make no scene. I do not mean to serve the papers on you here—"

The man's manner was so serious that Gaunt was checked. He thought himself the prey of some crank or swell beggar, and had meant to order the waiter to remove him. Then came the shock.

"They are papers," murmured the young man, "in Mrs. Gaunt's suit for divorce."

Gaunt faced him, dazed and incredulous.

"Mrs. Gaunt's suit for divorce," repeated the intruder. "I represent Messrs. Town & Trouble."

The room swam, and the figures in it began swaying ridiculously. Through the smoke-wreaths Gaunt caught sight of Mr. Jakey Trouble, who was entertaining a gay party, but at the same time watching his emissary at work out of the corner of his eye. Even then he did not realize how adroitly he had been trapped.

"I repeat," urged the young man again, "that I do not wish to serve the papers here. It would attract attention. But now that I am with you, you cannot escape, you know. I will accompany you to any private place you like, and serve them on you there."

The words restored Gaunt's composure. He did not desire any sort of scene in Delmonico's, and was already distressed at the thought of having been observed in conversation with such a person. "Perhaps you won't mind telling me," he said with a smile, "why you abstain from handing me your papers now. Is it out of consideration for me, or because Delmonico has forbidden that sort of thing."

The young fellow's face flushed a dull red. "It scarcely matters," he protested; and added, "shall we go?"

They passed into the street together. It seemed preposterous to Gaunt that this amazing piece of business could be enacted in the famous old restaurant; yet stranger things had happened there. He did not yet realize the full significance of the step that had been taken against him.

"If you don't object, Mr. Gaunt," said his new acquaintance, "we will go somewhere and sit down; I would like to chat with you awhile as well as give you the papers."

"In that case," assented his victim, readily, "we had better go to a hotel. We can converse at our ease there. I am really very much mystified."

He didn't then know the vital interests that were involved in his acceptance of these papers. If he had, he might have hammered the man into insensibility and escaped. As it was, he walked with him up Broadway to the Imperial Hotel. They entered the café together and sat down at a small table in a corner. Here Gaunt took the much-talked-of papers and read them over.

As he read, his face turned several shades of scarlet, and ended by remaining quite white. The bill in Agnes Gaunt's action charged him with infidelity and named his own house as the scene of the wrong-doing.

When greatly enraged, his habit was to speak with all possible calmness. He looked the lawyer's clerk straight in the eyes as he asked, very quietly: "What does this mean, you ruffian?"

"Really, Mr. Gaunt," was the nervous response; "you must not blame me. I am merely a servant, you know. I am but following instructions."

"I see," said the other, slowly. He was staring vacantly out of the window, all his joyousness of spirit shattered by this new atrocity. The old forlorn feeling of disgrace and hopelessness came upon him—the feeling that Fate was too strong. He had made—ah, such a fight for the right, and this was his reward. To see his name dragged forward once more, pitilessly, as that of one doubly dishonored; to know that that dishonor must again descend, eventually, through him, to his son; and to know, through it all, that this time he was innocent of any shadow of wrong-doing—that the very accusation was an outrage and a crime. It seemed too monstrous.

He turned to the man at his side in a towering passion. "Do you think for a moment, you—you ass!" he demanded fiercely, "that I will let such an iniquity go unchallenged? Do you think, or does your employer, Trouble, think, that

such a ridiculous charge can be fastened upon me? Why, man, you must all be insane to dream of such a thing."

"I hope, Mr. Gaunt," replied the young man, quickly and impressively, "that *you* are not so insane as to think of contesting a divorce suit—in New York. You might just as well be guilty as innocent, if you do."

"Insane—to defend my own name against a false charge?" The speaker breathed heavily and wiped his forehead with his handkerchief.

"Your name will need no defense, because it need not be attacked," answered the emissary. "Listen, Mr. Gaunt," he went on, speaking rapidly; "I will show you in a very few words that the course I propose, instead of being an injustice to you, is precisely what you desire. Pardon me, but I am correct, am I not, in assuming that so far as the mere dissolution of this marriage goes, our wishes are identical?"

Gaunt thought a minute before replying. "You may proceed on that basis."

"Then, sir, the thing is perfectly simple. You desire a divorce; so does Mrs. Plum. She has forestalled you in the action, that is all. If you will both of you leave the matter to US, and follow our instructions, it can be arranged with perfect simplicity."

"You ignore my point," said Gaunt coldly. "You make against me a wicked and calumnious charge—a charge that damns me in public and in private and as a matter of record. I will not only disprove the charge. I will ram it down your throats."

"You are strangely blind, Mr. Gaunt," was the reply, softly delivered; "you refuse to see that if you agree to my proposals no one but ourselves will even know of the charge. There need be no publicity."

"No publicity! Do you mean to say that a divorce can be applied for and granted in New York without people knowing of it?"

"I mean just this," rejoined the young man, speaking

earnestly, and in low tones; "in a case where the parties agree to separate, we can serve the papers, get the case before the court and the decree signed and everything sealed up, without a soul or a newspaper knowing one blessed thing about it. And we can do this, I tell you, in two months."

In two months! Freedom—absolute freedom in two months! He had dreamed vaguely in the past week of freedom as a matter of years. But two months! That might give him—great God! that might give him Elaine, might it not? A savage and riotous joy took possession of him. His voice trembled as he spoke:

"I don't quite understand. How can you do all this?"

"I explain in confidence, Mr. Gaunt. I am quite safe in doing so, I feel sure. I have served these papers on you, as you have seen. The next step is to go before a judge not too strict and ask for the appointment of a referee to hear testimony. Before this can be done we must have your consent. Without that consent the case would have to be tried in open court. Both parties consenting, the referee hears the testimony. On that testimony, he recommends the granting of the divorce. The judge, on his recommendation, signs the decree. Could anything be simpler?"

"And are you sure?" persisted Gaunt—stealthily, for somehow he felt like a thief, the temptation was so alluring—"will nothing be made public?"

"Not unless you tell it. I am tolerably sure we shan't. Come now; are matters really as bad as you thought?"

Gaunt did not answer for a moment. The man's callousness nauseated him. What vandalism!—what awful mockery of the marriage sacrament, even in the case of a marriage that was itself a mockery! He rose to leave. "I will think it over," he began—and paused.

"That is right," was the brisk assent. "Let us know in the morning, please. Remember, we shall require nothing whatever except your written consent to the reference. You do not even require counsel."

Gaunt thought differently on the last point. He clambered on board a cable-car and journeyed to a very tall building in the down-town district, where, somewhere near the eaves, he found a wise man of the law—quite on old man, who knew him and liked him well. To him he told his story and showed his papers.

"Well," commented his old friend coolly, at the conclusion of the recital, "they seem to have you pretty tight, my boy. Before I advise you, tell me what your own wishes are in the premises."

"I am tempted," replied Gaunt, with flushed face, "to submit."

"The result is worth the price, eh?"—this slyly—"but I am rather glad of it; because I do not see how you could possibly defend yourself, even if you wished to."

"That sounds strange."

"Does it?" The old gentleman laughed and stroked his beard. "Then let me tell you something, my boy, for your own enlightenment:—that there is nothing more amazing in all the world than the procedure in divorce cases, after the New York fashion and law. Let us see. What are your resources?"

Gaunt laughed. He thought of the Major's "statement," as he answered, lightly, "A few hundred dollars—and what I can earn."

"Exactly. I thought as much. Now have you observed, may I ask, that in these papers you have shown me the court is asked to grant the plaintiff a counsel fee of $500 and an allowance of $50 a week?"

"I hadn't noticed."

"Naturally. It seems such a trifle. Now would it seem such a trifle if a court ordered you to pay over that amount of money, at once, with indefinite imprisonment as the alternative?"

"How on earth can a man be sent to prison for failing to pay money he hasn't got?"

The old lawyer chuckled merrily. "Easiest thing in the

world. Suit is begun. Plaintiff's counsel's first move is to ask for the allowance. Court orders it. Wonderful confidence our judges have in the inexhaustibility of the national currency. I never knew one who wasn't liberal to a fault—with a gay husband's money. The defendant fails to pay. Having failed to pay, he is in contempt. The penalty for contempt? Order of arrest, and prison."

"That is cheerful," remarked Gaunt. "Don't the judges ever ask where the money is coming from?"

"Why should they? That's not their business. It's their business to order it paid. The assumption is that if the husband hasn't got it, he ought to have it; and the subsequent proceedings are conducted on that basis."

"Then if the defendant is ordered to pay, and he has no resources whatever, he must—"

"Go to prison or run. He can generally pay ferry fare to Jersey. Perhaps you can swim, though?"

"I swam the Hudson once."

"Well, I'd rather swim it in summer for fun than in winter to dodge alimony, but the thought of either is uncomfortable."

"But if the defendant runs away, how on earth is he to defend the action?"

"He can't, and nobody cares. The proposition, I suppose, is this: a man who can't support his wife after the fashion in which a court that doesn't know her from Cleopatra thinks she ought to be supported is not a desirable member of the community. If he can pay, he may remain; if he can't, he may remain, too—in jail. Nobody denies his right to flee, and having once flown, he is never brought back. He is not wanted in New York, that is all."

"Suppose a husband is without ready money, but is entirely willing to support his wife—to give her all he earns—would that not entitle him to some latitude, some grace?"

"Not five minutes. His not having saved his money proves him shiftless, and New York does not want shiftless citizens. To jail or Jersey with 'em. No matter which."

"Then in the case of a husband and wife who have lived up to their income, the wife has only to bring an action and obtain an order for the payment of a counsel fee in order to rid herself of her husband indefinitely, by compelling him to move to another state?"

"Precisely—unless he is fond of a jail diet, and he can't bother her when he's there, either. Take your own case; you're willing to support the Major's daughter, are you not?"

"Entirely so—if I am not compelled to live with her."

"Exactly. But you wish to live in New York?"

"Naturally."

"Very well. Let's see how you're going to do it. You have no money. You may, or you may not, make a lot by writing novels, as you have for the Major. Do you think the court's going to wait until you've written a novel and collected royalties on it before you pay the plaintiff's counsel fee? Not so, my young friend. Still, you might write an excellent novel in jail and use the proceeds to pay your way out."

"Then it really amounts to this—unless one can pay for the privilege, he cannot possibly defend himself against such a charge as confronts me, no matter how innocent he may be?"

"That is just what it amounts to, my boy," admitted the lawyer. "If you contest the action, an order will certainly be made upon you for counsel fee and alimony, pending the trial. The case may not be called for two years. As long as you pay, your defense holds; when you default, you must go away."

"But the five-hundred-dollar fee is essential?"

"Absolutely. Without it you are hopeless. There may be no earthly possibility of your getting hold of five hundred dollars, but you will be ordered to pay it just the same. Your defence may be a perfectly sound defence, but so long as you haven't the money to pay for the privilege of offering it, no one cares to listen to it. When you confess poverty

before a New York audience you confess to a greater crime than murder. You do not excite sympathy; only execration. So, even if you were not inclined, as you say, to 'submit,' I shall advise you to do so as a matter of policy."

"The Major," said Gaunt, musingly, "appears to have me hard and fast."

"From a strict standpoint of social ethics," replied the old lawyer, "I shall say the Major's course was rather—well, it is not my province to criticise adversaries, but to advise friends. Still, from his standpoint he has a defense. He doubtless foresaw the possibility of some aggressive action on your part, and, so to speak, headed you off. That statement of his was a great stroke. You didn't think he was going to supply you with funds for your own defense, did you? No, not if he owed you a million! He knew that if you were without money you could not possibly fight. Under the circumstances, his lawyer's proposition to you would be regarded by some people as a fair one."

"The court, I suppose, would not take cognizance of the fact that I was out of employment?"

"Hardly. It would be shown that you had worked for so many years for the Major. The profits your work had earned for him would not count. The fact that you had not secured profitable employment elsewhere would very likely be construed as evidence that the Major had kept you on *The Fang* out of generosity; and that, if nothing else, would serve to convince the judge of your eligibility for residence in New Jersey."

Gaunt fell out of his chair. He began pacing the floor, but stopped suddenly. "Can Trouble do what he claims?" he demanded.

His old friend sighed. "He can," he breathed gently. "He is the only man in New York who can, and how he does it Heaven only knows. But he can do it."

A long pause, during which a tiny French clock on the lawyer's desk could be heard ticking merrily. And far below, in Broadway, the traffic whirred and growled.

"I'll do it," said Gaunt quietly.

The lawyer rose and grasped his client's hand. "I'll look after you," he said, with kindness, "and won't charge you as much as five hundred, either. You'll be glad—in two months."

"In two months," mused Gaunt. The hum of the traffic sounded like music, but there was a discord in it. "You have enlightened me greatly," he added. "I see everything. In New York, proof of virtue is an article of commerce, purchasable only for cash. The price of proving one's innocence of infidelity is five hundred dollars, and if you haven't the money you are guilty. How very odd."

"My boy," said the wise man, laying a paternal hand on his client's shoulder, "let me tell you something. No one gets anything in the world without paying for it. You want your freedom, don't you?"

"I would almost die for it," confessed Gaunt, "but not at the price of disgrace."

"The disgrace, as you call it, is the price you must pay for your desire. In this state, a gentleman does not divorce his wife. If for any reason he cannot live with her, he causes her to divorce him. There are precedents for what you are doing—good ones. You must not grumble at the penalty. The world—strangers—your friends—will all believe you guilty. You will be free. You have done no wrong, but the tacit admission of wrong will stand on record against you, forever. That's your price."

"I should have to pay it, apparently, whether I wished to or not, and the man whom I have to thank for fixing the price is—"

"The Major," said the lawyer softly. "By accepting those papers, you rendered yourself absolutely powerless."

Gaunt's humor, as he left his friend and adviser, was one of peculiar contradictions. He walked up town at a furious pace, seeing nothing, but trying to evolve some order from the chaos. At one moment he found himself ready to sing with delight at the prospect of freedom; the next, over-

whelmed with humiliation at the thought of that freedom's cost. The advent of this day had found him prepared for emergencies, but its swift succession of events had left him stunned. It was providential, perhaps, that he should have run across Captain Clapham. The Captain, at such times, was a relaxation. He was now ornamenting the face of a pillar in front of the Hoffman House, and the tint of his nose advertised his willingness to be entertained. Gaunt felt the Captain's acceptance of a dinner to be an act of charity, and was grateful. So indeed, to do him justice, was the Captain. To prove it, he punished two bottles of very good Burgundy to his own whistle, and succeeded in injecting a passable counterfeit of sincerity into his expressions of regret at his host's refusal to share them. Afterwards, with the alacrity of true good fellowship, he accepted an invitation to bowl up the Riverside Drive in a cab—it was one of the nights upon which Gaunt felt any company to be preferable to solitude—and it was the stop at Claremont that proved fatal. Here the Captain, who had lately been abstemious for reasons of economy, insisted on the unlimited consumption of cognac and the indefinite relation of personal love-stories. Even this might have been bearable if he had not spied a man who he vowed resembled the departed Commodore; whereupon he proceeded to weep into his shirt front until Gaunt, in self-defense, called the cab and sent him home alone. The Captain loudly protested his gratitude even as he climbed within, and if his face rested on the cushions and his feet on the dashboard, who had the right to complain, so long as the fare was paid? "Where to, sir?" asks Jehu, a respectful forefinger at his ear. "Heaven," murmurs the Royal Navy, absently, as it falls asleep. "Any old place," says Gaunt, and away goes the cab and its load. Heave-ho! roll a man down! Oh, roll him over the embankment, cabby. Who'd ever miss him, if you did?

Some hours had been killed, but there were still wakeful

ones ahead. Till after midnight a man stood before the monument—that fairest spot in all New York on a moonlight night—looking down on the serene white marvel of the river, and thinking, very earnestly, of a woman and a little child in the West—many miles away.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE COMEDY OF DIVORCE

The central figure of the room was Mr. Jakey Trouble.

The little man was smiling—a broad, bland smile, that exuded good nature and split his countenance in half. The court of the Referee—title suggestive of fights—had not yet been called to order, and nearly all its occupants were whispering at once.

The room itself was dingy and sparsely furnished—being merely the back room of a counselor-at-law in moderate practice. The building in which it was situated was of the usual height—scraping the clouds—and the Broadway traffic boomed beneath. In the middle of the floor was a large, square desk, upon which lay some cheap prints and stale magazines. In a row, on flimsy cane-bottomed chairs, sat four or five negroes, men and women, wondrously clothed, and invested with the droll self-consciousness that marks the race on such occasions. At the extremity of the room, beyond the desk, were Major Plum, Agnes Plum Gaunt and Miss Dearthing; at the end nearest the door, as far away as they could get, Eustace Gaunt and his counsel. The Major looked profound, his daughter satisfied. The negroes were silent; Miss Dearthing whispering volubly and Mr. Trouble smiling good-naturedly.

This liliputian worker of miracles in the New York divorce courts owed his conspicuousness, in scenes like this, to two things—his never-ceasing smile and his habit of

remaining on his feet. His standing posture commanded attention; his smile held it. As he stood now, near the desk, and smiled, smiled, smiled, it was impossible to look at him and not feel good natured, too. He seemed like some good Fairy of the Fables, about to distribute presents. While awaiting the developments of the familiar comedy in which he was to be the star, Mr. Trouble's habit was to fold his hands behind him, lean far forward on the balls of his feet and then rock slowly backward to his high heels, bringing them together with a sharp click just before they touched the floor. It was a skillful performance, and one that persons with vital interests at stake found especially fascinating.

A month had elapsed since the meeting of Mr. Trouble's clerk with Gaunt at Delmonico's. The interval is worthy of record, as indicating the length of time required by the little wizard in the performance of his miracles.

The door opened abruptly and an elderly, very large gentleman, of benign aspect, but with weary eyes, entered. His clothes had seen service, and he carried in his hand an unlighted, half-smoked cigar. This was Mr. O'Rourke, the referee to whom the Supreme Court of the State of New York had entrusted the task of taking testimony in and estimating the merits of many divorce cases. He was followed by a stenographer.

Mr. Trouble hopped forward and greeted Mr. O'Rourke affably, addressing him as "Judge," and introducing him one by one, to everybody present, including the blacks. The referee, or "judge," had a pleasant nod and a weary smile for all. Mr. Trouble guided him to his chair at the desk as a sturdy little tug pushes a mountainous steamer to her dock. A disinterested spectator, at this stage of the proceedings, would have advanced the opinion that Mr. Trouble was their sole instigator and director. For once Major Plum found himself in a room in which there was a figure more important than himself.

Mr. O'Rourke, having seated himself satisfactorily, with Mr. Trouble's assistance, gave a tired glance about him and

dealt his desk a languid blow with a two-foot rule. This act changed the den into a court. The stenographer at the same time issued a gruff and wholly superfluous command for silence.

The referee, after quite three minutes of thoughtful scanning of the green baize before him, looked up, nodded at the little high-heeled wizard and sighed, "Go on, Mr. Trouble."

Mr. Trouble's smile grew more expansive. He requested Agnes Gaunt to take a vacant chair near the referee. While questioning the lady the little man appeared to grow quite excited. He raised his voice, swung his arms, rocked backward and forward more violently and clicked his heels together more smartly than ever—exertion that, if necessary, was the more praiseworthy on such a close day.

The witness testified, briefly, to the facts of her marriage to the defendant and of her having left him when informed that he had been unfaithful to her.

A colored hall-boy of the house in which the Gaunts had lived testified that he had seen a veiled lady emerging from their apartment at a time when Mrs. Gaunt was in the country.

Two colored servants, females, testified to the same thing.

A janitor testified to the large quantities of champagne delivered at the Gaunt apartment.

A brisk-mannered negro boy, of the Pullman car porter type, described certain proceedings that he had witnessed on such and such a night through the Gaunt windows. The proceedings, according to his statement, involved cigarettes, champagne and skirt-dancing, and their date tallied with the date of the exit of the veiled lady.

Mr. Trouble's smile of approval upon this witness threatened the obliteration of his face. Then, all at once, the manner of the little man underwent a prodigious and remarkable change. The smile faded. His brow blackened. The pleasant accents in which he had questioned witnesses died away and were replaced, as he turned to address "The Court,"

with those of furious wrath and scorn. "Your honor-rrr-rrr-rrr!" he vociferated, his perilous rocking on the high heels adding to the mightiness of the elocutionary effect, "we res-sss-ssssttt!" The high heels stabbed the floor with a bang. "This defendant, your honor-rr-rrr-rrrr,"—the speaker spun around on the high heels and pointed the manicured finger of obloquy at Gaunt—"has sat here, represented by coun-SEL"—no authority for the accentuation of this word was quoted—"and has failed to deny the charges we have bror-rut against him. Your honor-rr-rrr"—the high heels rattled like castanets—"I ask that your honor-rr-rrr recommend the granting of a divorce against Mr. Eustace-sssss Gaunt!" The high heels threatened to go through the floor. The reprobation and horror conveyed in the hissing of the defendant's name were appalling and infinite.

At this point Major Plum, convinced of the impropriety of his further maintenance of an inconspicuous attitude, proceeded to strike a theatrical one. He stood up, advanced his right foot, drooped his chin upon his inflated chest and extended his arms. "Ducks!" he exclaimed. "Don't be silly, papa," admonished his daughter, with decision, and the embrace went begging. Whereat Miss Dearthing chuckled.

Astounding as had been Mr. Trouble's change from jollity to indignation, his restoration to affability was even more abrupt. No sooner had he finished his denunciation of Gaunt than he turned to shake hands with him, after the manner of one gratefully rewarding a valuable service. He then turned to the row of complacent negro witnesses, with a sort of sharp bark and a forward movement of both palms, shooing them from the room like a lot of black chickens. Major Plum, Agnes Plum, the referee, and the stenographer received smiles and handshakes in turn. The little wizard was all over the place at once, clicking his high heels and congratulating everybody. There was no formal adjournment of "The Court." It simply rose by general consent and to the general relief. The stenographer gathered

up his notes. Mr. O'Rourke rolled out of his chair and hastened into the next room, intent upon more important business.

The legal proceedings had occupied just twelve minutes. Prior to this time neither plaintiff nor defendant had entered any court-room. There was no reason why any living soul outside of this little dingy room—atom of space in a swarming city—should know of one event that had taken place, one word that had been said. The testimony offered had been absolutely ludicrous. Neither the defendant nor his counsel had uttered a syllable. Yet the proceeding was possible, because the defendant had connived at it—had agreed to accept the burden of guilt as the price of liberty—and on the strength of it an absolute divorce would be granted. That was the problem of divorce in New York as reduced to a science by Mr. Trouble. Looking at the brisk little gentleman in this, the hour of his modest triumph, Gaunt felt inclined to agree with those who hailed him as a benefactor to his race. The whole thing seemed too marvelous to be true.

During the testimony against him he had been overwhelmed with repulsion and disgust—a repulsion that not all his mad hopes for the future could in any way mitigate or soften. To listen in silence to coarse and revolting falsehoods by strange witnesses—and such witnesses!—was an ordeal to which he had schooled himself in advance, and which he bore with apparent unconcern, but inwardly with something very like despair. Was this part of the atonement? If so, it was bitter enough.

There was an episode, unexpected, and possessing dramatic elements, that took place before the leading characters in the comedy retired. The Major, his daughter and Miss Dearthing were standing in a group at their end of the room. Across the narrow space that separated them, Gaunt met the glance of the woman with whom he had lived for nearly two years and who had faithfully served Heaven as its instrument for the requital of his wrongs to another. It was a

glance that freed him instantly from any sentiment of sympathy or regret, so far as she was concerned. It was not this glance, however, so much as that of Miss Dearthing that held his attention. This sprightly young woman was struggling so hard to conceal her laughter that apoplexy seemed imminent; and the mirth and mockery in her eyes awoke in the brain of the man who saw them a new and amazing idea. He recalled the incidents of a certain Thursday evening some time back, and compared them with the testimony of to-day. They fitted.

Outside, in bustling Broadway, he told his counsel of the relations the young woman with the divided teeth bore to the family and of his entertainment of her in the apartment. "She," he concluded, "was the veiled lady."

The lawyer stopped short in the middle of a crossing, narrowly escaping pulverization by a truck. "Well," said he, very devoutly, "I'm damned."

Gaunt rode uptown feeling fatigued and depressed. He met Major Plum that evening, in a club to which they both belonged. Men were lounging about the room in indolent attitudes and light clothes. The heat was oppressive for September. "Why, boo-oo-oy," exclaimed the old gentleman jovially, "how-de-do, how-de-do?" For an instant his son-in-law felt symptoms of paralysis. He was about to answer in a just manner, but recognized the impropriety of such a proceeding and swallowed his wrath. His face was perfectly impassive as he grasped the Major's outstretched hand and, gripping it with a violence that made him wince, led him by it to a window. Once safe in the embrasure, he whispered, so softly that no curious members might hear: "If you ever dare speak to me again I'll tear your tongue out." For this the Major subsequently reported him to the House Committee, accusing him of conduct unbecoming a gentleman, and he was promptly disciplined.

CHAPTER XLIX

THE SWEETNESS OF CERTAINTY

"Now," the lawyer had said, with a twinkle of his kindly old eyes, "I want you to get straight away from here, and not bother me. You won't be needed any more. In three weeks, or four at the most, the decree will be signed. There are no further formalities. (No raptures, young man, if you please.) Take my advice and get into the country somewhere. Brush the cobwebs out of your brain. Before you go, leave me your address and I'll telegraph you when to come back. When I do so you may go where you please and do what you please. You'll have the right."

The "Right!" Oh, exquisite word! How it danced and sang through the Dreamer's numb skull, tempting him with sweet possibilities and painting all creation into a picture too beautiful for belief. With the goal in sight—a goal not indecently striven for but awaited with humility and patience—the final remnant of shame at the means disappeared. Means! Methods!—pooh, who cared for such trifles when whole lives were at stake? And amid a scene of noble simplicity and grandeur like this—a very garden-land of nature hidden in the hills—what room for thoughts of a pettifogging town, or for any thought not wedded to things sacred and tender and pure? Youth, youth, when you do come back, after long groping in the quagmires and dark places, the glory of the resurrection has no limit!

"Brush the cobwebs out of your brain." It was good advice. He was following it here among the hills. What exile is so delicious as one self-imposed, with relief from a dire misery as its ultimate reward?

Hidden away, the Dreamer was, in a nook of his own choosing, secure from curious eyes, and hugging to his

heart, jealously, the project that brought him nearer, day by day, to the manhood he had affronted and put aside. A nook in the Catskills—one need not name it, for there are fifty just such buried villages nestling within fifty miles of one another among the "Hills of the Sky" as the poetic Indian called them—and for one in his mood and condition there could have been no happier hiding-place. The splendor of early autumn in the Catskills—you have known it, have you not? No epic there of swelling seas and mincing yachts and verandas afloat in tulle, but a broader, simpler lay—a lay that has for its central theme majestic pyramids of towering slope and crag, and for its orchestral setting the gentler harmonies of winding brown roads and pious farmhouses and flippant brooks, impudently noisy and laughingly white. In this land of brook and slope, of jerky brown road and tinted foliage, there is a life that is kinder and gentler than the eternal sparkle and glare of the life by the sea that we all of us, with strange fatuity, prefer in summer. The sea for life—the hills for sleep. 'Tis a good motto.

To this villege, then, came Gaunt for his weeks of waiting. He had found it long whiles ago on a fishing trip, at a time when solitude was a luxury beyond price, and had never forgotten its beauty or its utter quiet. It was a straggling little settlement, thrust away at the bottom of a broad basin of hills, boasting a most honest tavern and an honest trout stream that sparkled and coquetted past the farmers' very doors. Then, he had viewed its charms through the lens of hopelessness and cynicism, and they had failed to affect him. Whereas, now—

In two short days, where were the black retrospection, the assailing horde of blue devils? Gone, like all other horrors, before the knowledge of a fight squarely fought and a prize well won. Gone, before the resistless magic of God's own beautiful hills and sky and air—gone, and helped in the speeding by the faint memory of those other hills and waters —away to the northward, and to which he was never going back. Years of bitterness, years of loss, years of despair—

now all ended; and, facing him, sweetly and gloriously, the bright Certainty of a restoration that he had once learned to believe was denied him forever and ever. Waking in the morning, in the sunlight, with this Certainty in his heart; carrying it with him in the day and bidding it a reluctant goodnight when he slept—health, strength and a clear brain his best friends, and the trees and sky and sun that he loved his only confidants—gods, what a life!

Look, for a moment, at a day of it, and see. Up, say, with the dawn, for the bite of the air forbids a later slumber, and out for a ramble along the road that skirts the rushing little braggart river. There is a faint mist over the giant hills where the shade of Rip Van Winkle hovers, and against their lofty line the sky shines doubly blue. Miles count for little, though the tavern-keeper's good breakfast is hours away, and when one's wind is good and one's legs are stout —as they should be—one may travel far without thought of people or things unworthy. Down now, to the very brink of the river, where there is a shelf of moss and pine-needles and a necklace of half-buried rocks, across which the foam flies creamily. There is here a calm, deep pool, and—yes, the temptation is irresistible. How long is it since a cool brook coaxed you into its embrace in the early morning in the garb that Nature gave you? Long years, eh? Then you surely do not blame this wanderer. So, off come the prisoning rags and it's souse, head-over-heels, ten feet down among the trout! The splash brings a choral rebuke from the robins, and a brown squirrel erects himself on his haunches in the pine-needles and stares audaciously. Then a strong, steady overhand stroke up-stream (oh, bliss, that fair, clean battle with the current!) and so to a point in the shallows where comes the highest sensation of all. For a saucy tributary stream comes tearing down from somewhere in the jumble of crags above, and lying there, a friendly rock embraced by either arm for support, the bather suffers the foaming miniature torrent to pour unchecked over head and shoulders and arms. To feel the smart of that keen, cold

crystal flood—to watch the beads fly from the burnished muscles, and to banquet meanwhile on a landscape of supreme beauty—well, who could blame a man at such a moment for forgiving his enemies and felicitating himself? The bather dresses guiltily, as in the days when he was licked for just such performances, and after that there is time to stand on a rock and watch the fish. There are scores of them in that pool—plump, speckled fellows, with symmetrical fins and cavernous gills, and they lie idly in the shade, waiting the lure of some sallow-browed mountaineer, who thinks little of brook trout as a dainty, because so easily obtained. (If he had ever eaten them at "Del's," alack! four inches long, at a dollar a trout!) Trout, say you? The bather groans. Something is hammering against the interior walls of his stomach like a flail and the brook sings less sweetly by reason of the brutal charm of breakfast. Didst ever see strong men eat in these parts? They follow, at meal-times, one unvarying line of conduct. They form in groups on the tavern-keeper's piazza and wait feverishly. When the gong rings, there is no polite subterfuge of assumed hesitation, no veneer of diffident hanging back. They form squads and rush for the dining-room like football-players. The younger element frequently goes so far as to cheer. The provender disappears as if handled with pitchforks. One would think the tavern-keeper would be bankrupt, but he stands to his guns manfully and passively aids and abets the slaughter. Then the day flies. For the exiled Dreamer there are long prowls up the mountains, or headlong gallops on horseback along the winding roads—always with that blessed Certainty locked tight in his breast and helping him to pin his faith anew to the beautiful beliefs taught him as a boy in a little church across seas, before the kindest father in the world meekly folded his hands and left him to tussle with life without guidance. Anon the evening train rumbles in and the dusk sinks stealthily, like a thief, scolloping the sky-line brokenly, like the thread of copper in a sheet of ore; to be followed by the brooding hush of an

utter and infinite peace—the sermon of expiring light in the mountains. In the cottages of the natives along the roadway, robust babies are being put to bed and the dogs are snoozing at the gate. The stream shines white—the one silver thread in the blanket of murk—and somewhere, far away, there is a church-bell chiming. Later, on the edge of dreamland itself, there is a jumbled-up kaleidoscope—tall mountains—scarlet leaves—the brave tavern-keeper; then trout—plump, sullen, trout—swimming through the tops of fir-trees or between the Dreamer's toes, as he laves, naked and in heavenly fashion, in a brawling brook. Last of all, a final and sleepy contemplation of the Certainty—the precious Certainty! and then—oblivion.

Such were the days, and as they passed, the world grew fairer and fairer to the exile's view and his exaltation rose to loftier heights. The pure, sweet life of the hills—the nights of rest—the days of vigorous action—brought him a mental serenity and a bodily strength that gave him the sensations of a king. So glorious was the sense of freedom, so complete his consciousness of atonement for wrong, that he ceased to harbor resentment against any living being. Injuries? Bah! Who could hate—among these mountains? Who could cherish malice—with a million birds chanting madrigals in the gorgeous leaves? In these weeks of waiting, he lived his whole life over—educated by its errors, chastened by its griefs. The thought of the blessing he was about to gain made him humble, despite his joy, and he was sorry even for persons who had injured him; for he had learned the lesson which we all learn at some time or another in our lives, that he who wrongs his neighbor will inevitably become the architect of his own punishment. In times past it had been his habit to hold Imogen Leal as the primary cause of his undoing. He saw now the childishness of such a thought—saw that that error or series of errors had been his, and his only; and he hoped devoutly that things were well with her. He caught himself at odd

moments actually sympathizing with the Major and wishing him long life to counterfeit emotion and assassinate chops. His high spirits led him into a variety of extravagances. He made friends with solemn brown children and romped with them in the road or made sport for them by chasing their goats and dogs through the yard like mad. He cracked foolish jokes with the postmaster and risked arrest as a disturber of the peace by extending hospitality to the village drunkard. He held long conclaves o' nights with the tavern-keeper, who, honest Teuton that he was, knew his Wagner as well as he did the anatomy of a calf and played him right well on his wheezy old piano; and who discussed with him, over long pipes of prime tobacco, the knottinesses of Schopenhauer, and Richter, and Feuerbach. And night after night, before seeking that sturdy sleep of content—with the Certainty to whisper to and adore!—he stood outside in the crisp air under the stars, bareheaded and humble, thanking his God for a clean heart and for the right to pray for and dream of his best-beloved. Where now, if you please, the idleness and fastidiousness and vanity of an irresponsible and misspent youth? Faded!—scattered to the winds, and in their place the recognition of the obligations of manhood and the determination to fulfill them. "Sweet are the uses of adversity," say you? Verily, no truer word was ever writ.

Not that it was all mere waiting and time-killing, either; for there dawned upon the Dreamer-in-Exile about this time the idea for his Book—ah, a very great book it was to be, beyond all doubt!—and being by this time a literary person without prospects save those he might create for himself, it was very proper that he should set about opening the avenues to future distinction and riches. The Book was to be the effort of his life, of course—a book so bad it should earn him money enough to do nothing for the next ten years but read good ones—and it was to tell his own story; for he felt sure that there could be no more curious persons or events in Life than those that had come under his own

observation. He was to be the central figure, of course, and in depicting his own character he would say such gentle and gracious things about himself that all his friends would be sure to believe them. (I think I have remarked that his vanity had quite disappeared.) The plot? Good Lord, was there not plot enough and to spare? He nourished the idea carefully and found it improved on acquaintance. The Book should make him famous. With it he should take his place, easily and as a matter of right, among men of letters. Its beauty of expression and cleanliness of purpose should atone for his lamentable association with *The Fang* and help him to live that iniquity down. It should be his vindication. So he threw himself into the work with ardor, writing all through the long afternoons and keeping his mornings and nights for the idler's joys. He worked steadily and surely, noting with the connoisseur's pleasure, the fluency with which the chapters reeled themselves off. The fascination of the story grew upon him as it unfolded itself in his hands. He painted with merciless fidelity the grotesque imbecility of his own achievements and gave credit in some measure to persons that had rendered him assistance. As the days went by, he increased the number of his hours of labor, and he saw, as he progressed, that he was engaged in a work upon which great things depended. He could not tell, of course, how the story would end; but if Elaine—ah, what a very passion of idolatry he contrived to weave about his portrayal of her! He pictured her beauty, her gentleness, her sweetness of character, in phrases that breathed in every syllable the reverence and worship in which he had held her all his life, and he lauded, with a lavishness all might see, the spirit of purity and unselfishness that had controlled her every act. He had no clear idea of the use he would make of the story when completed—if it ever were completed—but its preparation brought him the elation of the devotee as well as that of the artist; because the work, after all, was an offering at the shrine of one dearly beloved. So the Book waxed and grew, a great lot day by day, weaving it-

self into shape and form and helping to speed—the waiting. And as he wrote, the task seemed to draw him nearer and nearer to Elaine, which was better still.

To Elaine—ah, yes! He tried, quite without success, to think clearly and rationally of the miracle that was to give them back to him—the Wife and Son! He could not do it. When his dreaming brought him to the point of their meeting, he became confused and blind, and could only laugh thanksgivings or mumble prayers.

His hardest task, and one wholly self-imposed, was that of maintaining silence toward her. Since his last letter to Elaine, sent from the Lake, no written word had passed between them. His sense of right on this point was perhaps exaggerated, but it told him that while he was legally bound to another woman it would be shame and insult to the woman he loved, and whom he had never ceased to regard as his wife, to speak of his love or hint at his approaching freedom to declare it. Besides, there were coarse and repugnant details in connection with the procuring of this freedom that could not be written of gracefully to a woman of pure mind. He was to be saddled, moreover, with a tacit admission of wrong, and that could only be explained in one way—afterwards. And was there not always the possibility—though far too grievous to contemplate!—that something might go wrong?—that all might fail of consummation? What right to mar the peace of her life with speculations that would in any case disturb and distress her? No. It cost him many a pang, but he kept to the lines that he had himself laid down. He yearned every hour for the right to share his secret with her, but he would not offer her the humiliation of hearing his protestations or his prayers, so long as his infidelity to her was sanctioned by an absurd legal bond. Not until he was free. He could trust her and he would wait.

Not write to her? No. Not speak to her? Ah, that was different!

Speak to her in the literal sense, of course, he could not,

but did all sense escape her, even thro' those miles and miles of distance, of the story of passionate and imperishable worship that he poured out to her, aloud, in his solitude there, every day? If there is any truth whatever in the theory of thought-transfer, she must have heard and felt. A dignified spectacle, truly, that of a grown man and a robust, stalking down a mountain-side in the morning, booted and unshaven, or wandering miles beside a rollicking brook at night, declaiming strenuous apostrophes to a loved one far away. And that loved one his own wife! Laugh, cynics, laugh, for that's worse yet. Listen, though, for a moment, to his lover's babble. It may divert you—coming from one so truly old enough to know better:

"Love—little wife! do you hear? There's another day gone and another dark page blotted out. You are nearer to me—nearer—nearer! I can see you at this moment—your hair—your mouth—your dear, dear eyes. * * * Why have I not a million voices, that I may thank God with them all at once? * * * Do you see that stretch of hill, Elaine, stately with trees and blazing with golden-rod? Do you know what it makes me think of? The golden-rod is your hair, my dear, blowing every way, in fairness and fragrance, and the trees are like your heart—an honest crimson, brave and sturdy. * * * I am happy, little one, happy at last. Do you know why? Because at last, I think I am going to bring happiness to you. * * * Happy! * * * God! * * * Why, you foolish child, there was never a grief or sorrow in all the world; or, if there was, I have forgotten it.

"Memory—memory is rising like a beautiful mist of the morning! Do you know what I see in it—wife—darling? Why, you, always you! I see you stealing off with me from your school and giving your books to the old candy-woman at the corner to keep for you till it is time to go home. I can see you at the theatre—your sweet face bright or sorry with the mimic life on the stage. I can see you dancing with me in a great roomful of men and girls—

none half so pretty as you. I can see you in church. I can see you, blushing and meek, in your little gray bridal dress. I can see you in every place and guise that God ever let me see you in in the dear old days, and in each of them you are lovelier than you were in the one before. Wherever I go and whatever my dream, it is you, dear—only you!"

Words, words! How trite they would seem if written down. When spoken to the clouds and the fields, with only the birds and the hares and the squirrels for audience, they did not really sound so foolish. Listen to his raving again:

"He's ours, Elaine—think of that! The gallant, splendid little chap with the glorious voice and the eyes just like yours. What a man we'll make of him! With no other pledge between us, that would be enough, wouldn't it? * * * I false—to you! Do you think now, that that old, old crime was falseness? It was a degradation and a villainy, maybe, but not a falseness; for it left me, utterly, when I found it had cost me—you. * * * You were the one—the Wife. You are the Wife now—the one love dear and precious before all. No wife has been so loved since the world began. * * * Did I not tell you that loving as we once loved, we can't forget? * * * It was true, little one, true as Heaven!

"Do you know why I adore you so now? Listen! Because I am in a very beautiful place—very beautiful and very peaceful—and because I can never be in a beautiful and peaceful place without thinking of you. Because of the life I've led—the life I had to lead. Do you know that this is my first chance in a year-and-a-half to feel clean and pure? It's because I feel so now that I love you; for the only real love in the world is the love that has purity for its blessing and inspiration—the love of the Wife! Every pure thought that I have ever known—of religion, poetry, music—has had its well-spring and fountain-head in you. Your influence and the knowledge that you lived have kept me living.

Without you I should have died. * * * Poetry! Music! We think that we love them, don't we? Do you know there is no poetry—no music—in the actual sense of their being? It is the ideal we weave into our reading of them that gives them life and beauty. Beautiful music brings me—you! Beautiful poetry brings me—you! You, therefore, are my music and poetry. I love both, but without you, either would be meaningless. Do you understand? * * * To get out of the old, hopeless life into this strong, magnificent life! * * * I feel as if I could knock down rocks and tear up trees. * * * O, ecstasy of strength! I believe it is you that have given me back that, too. * * * To be back in a life that will let me love animals, and children and books! * * * Elaine, little child-sweetheart, what a life we shall lead together!

"Little witch, how dare you! What do you mean by mocking me like that? I can see you coming tripping down the hill there, in a white dress, with a smile in your eyes and your hands full of wood-violets and clover. * * * No, it is not you; it is only the mist. * * * But that was the way you come down the hill, oh, years ago, do you remember, the first summer we spent together? And afterwards you made me carry you through the field in my arms because you were afraid of snakes. You must remember that. I can remember, even now, the scent of your hair, and the touch of your cheek against mine—

> I can see my love descending o'er the hill to my embrace,
> Shaming all the ripening roses with the glory of her face—

do you not remember the verses you inspired that day? * * * Little one, your spell is eternal, and I glory in it!"

Poetry, too! Things had come to a strange pass, you see. Still, there could not be insanity in it—aside from the proposition that all men in love are insane, and in which case all married men who love their wives are insane, are they not?—he was too healthy, and had too good an appetite, for

that. Yet one more rhapsody—how well it sounded to the accompaniment of a scarlet sunrise and a turbulent brook:

"Love—my wife—we will begin again. You will be the sweetest, gentlest bride in the world—the tenderest flower that one may pluck and the more charming because your beauty is a story you have taught to me before. We will have a little yacht, you and Billy and I, and we will sail far away, for awhile, to warm seas, and we shall see no one and in our new life we'll forget the old life—the bitter life—the black life—the life that I made. Shall we, Elaine? * * * Yes, I can trust you. * * * You will! * * * Do you hear those thrushes? They are singing, 'My love—my darling—my heart's desire.' They are plagiarists. That is my song."

So ran his wits away. Honest imbecile, sunburned and vigorous, spouting to dumb nature the words his full heart could not contain. Striding for miles along mountain-sides or cantering the brown roads on horseback—ah, me, the eloquence to which that old gray gelding had to listen!—it was all the same. Sometimes he varied his oratorical performance by singing—singing loudly and defiantly, and not infrequently, I fear, without due regard to laws of tone-production or of pitch. This was chiefly at night, when the chances of arrest were minimized. His plight was unusual but not extraordinary. It was the plight, merely, of a healthy man too overjoyed to behave with intelligence.

And then came the telegram.

It arrived late one Saturday afternoon, while Gaunt was at work on the Book. On the direct narrative itself he had for some days ceased steady writing, contenting himself with blocking out the ground for the chapters. The blocking-out process was now nearly accomplished. In the final chapter he was handing himself over to Elaine; was so engaged, indeed, when—

The telegram came.

It was brought him by his honest German landlord, whose blue eyes forgot to twinkle. In that tavern telegrams usually meant departures.

The yellow slip bore the old lawyer's signature, and read:

"All right. All your papers at the Epicures' Club. Go West and God bless you."

There rang through the room a mighty Indian war-hoop. The recipient of the telegram became, for the moment, quite irresponsible. He heaved his chair across the room, kicked over his table, with all his papers on it, and executed a break-down that brought plaster from the ceiling.

"Mein Gott!" breathed the landlord gently, "bist du verrückt oder betrunken?"

For answer, Gaunt embraced him like a brother.

There was no train for New York till after midnight. Before it left, the tavern furnished some scenes that were long remembered in those parts. The landlord switched from "Tristan" to "Es hat night sollen sein" and similar lays. The postmaster himself brewed the punch, the effects of which, though he drank none himself, were most enjoyed by the man who paid for it. The departing guest was escorted to the little tumble-down station by the entire male population, all singing. Some hours earlier, he had sent this telegram to Chicago:

"Meet me if you can at three-thirty Monday afternoon at the Michigan Central station. I shall bring good news."

The Certainty approached realization.

CHAPTER L

THE REBUKING OF AN EVIL-DOER

"Ho!" cried Romney, in his great bass, "bully for you, brave boy! Off you go, and my blessing and my heart go with you!" And he dealt his friend, on his back, a mighty slam—mighty enough to prove good fellowship beyond all doubt.

The train for the West did not leave for two hours, and they were chatting in the Epicures' Club, where Gaunt had come for the legal papers referred to in the lawyer's telegram. A New York club is not lively on a Sunday morning. They had the Fifth Avenue windows to themselves.

"It's providential, your coming in, old boy," declared Gaunt, with another grip of the hand, "you're the only soul in New York I wanted to see, or whom I'd have told where I was going."

"Nothing providential about it," beamed the lanky one, who himself seemed to be bursting with news and a sense of importance as well. "I've been here pretty nearly every day looking for you. I know that no club will give a member's address, and it's a good rule, but I tried every way I knew to charm yours out of this one. The only way I could find you was to keep on coming till you came yourself."

"Well," grinned Gaunt with the cheerful irrelevance of a man overjoyed, "now that you've found me, how do you like me?" He dropped into a great arm-chair and stretched his arms and legs luxuriously.

"Oh, you're well enough," jeered his friend, in accents meant to be cynical but which became affectionate instead, "you look as if you'd been to heaven, and you've only been divorced. You ought to be ashamed of yourself."

"I am."

"You look, furthermore, as if you had been working in the sun like a drayman and eating from a manger, like a horse. You are disgustingly healthy and satisfied. I suppose you are so enamored of your own good fortune that you haven't time to congratulate me on mine."

Gaunt looked up suddenly. "You?" he inquired, "why?"

The face of Mr. Robert Lee Romney, already becomingly sunburned, took on a fine brickdust red. He seemed fairly exploding with the desire to speak, but controlled it, and, with a fine air of slyness, fished a small newspaper clipping from his pocketbook and handed it over. It contained several paragraphs, varying in length from one to eight lines. under the head of "Hotel Arrivals." One of the lines was "rung" in blue pencil. It read: "Mr. R. L. Romney and wife are at the Waldorf-Astoria."

The other man came out of his chair like a shot. "Dear old boy!" he exclaimed, wringing the culprit's hand almost off, "when did it happen?"

"In the first place," confessed Romney, "it's a lie about the Waldorf. We did stay there a day. Not that we didn't have the price to stay longer, but I didn't want my wife to learn to blush so early in the game. The Waldorf crowd is swift and pretty, but—it isn't for brides. So I just tipped the clerk a tenner to keep on showing that page of the register to the *Herald* reporters. Meanwhile, we're at Bay Ridge."

"Where's that?"

"Over Brooklyn way. Don't sneer, you beast, or I'll throw this chair at you."

"I wasn't sneering," laughed Gaunt, happily, "I was only thinking—the dapper, the exquisite, the fastidious Mr. Romney married, and in Brooklyn! Heavens, what a fall was there, my countrymen!"

The lanky one growled, and grinned in his turn: "Well," he boasted, "I'm not ashamed of it, either. We've money to go where we please, thank God, but just now we prefer

Brooklyn. Cackling again, are you? Well, let me give you something more to laugh at. Do you know what we do?" This with superb defiance. "We sit on the dock for two hours every morning, before I come to town, and fish. What do you think of that?"

"Hurrah!" cried Gaunt, in delight, "now I know you love her! Old fellow, I congratulate you with all my heart." He beckoned with his eyebrows to an attendant: "A gin fizz for Mr. Romney."

"What!" exclaimed the latter, in horror. He added solemnly, if a little mournfully, "I don't drink."

Gaunt looked skeptical, and as the servant decorously vanished, he rolled his eyes at the ceiling and murmured: "When did you say the world came to an end?"

"Oh, I know," bayed his friend, "crack a few moth-eaten jokes now, why don't you, about the distilleries closing and all that sort of thing? It seems to me there was once a time when two or three Broadway hotels had to shut up. That was when you stopped drinking yourself. Eustace, my boy," he added more seriously, "don't let's chaff. I've found the way to happiness—it's the only way"—

"And that is?"

"In being decent."

Good old Bob! He looked as if he meant it. There was a pause, during which the two men exchanged the glance that, between men, means something stronger than brotherhood.

"I don't know your wife, old boy," said Gaunt softly, when they had clasped hands again, "but when I meet her I am going to ask permission to thank her for making my best friend happy."

"She knows all about you," answered Romney, "and she's praying for you—the little saint—because you're my friend."

Men are never sentimental with one another for long. In another minute these two were laughing again and chatting about trifles. Romney, however, suddenly recollected

something. He drew forth another newspaper clipping. "I suppose you've seen this," he said, "it was in the *Herald* yesterday."

Gaunt read, and his face whitened through its tan. It was a brief paragraph, setting forth briefly the fact that a certain Judge had signed a decree of divorce in Agnes Gaunt's favor, and reciting the cause. Mr. Trouble, then, had violated the agreement after all; the desire for advertisement had been too strong for the divorce lawyer and he had told his news to a newspaper. Gaunt threw the clipping to the floor and turned away, sick at heart.

"Now, then," observed Mr. Romney, in a comforting bass roar and with another prodigious slap on the back, "you mustn't be idiotic on the very verge of your restoration. What the dickens does a little obscure paragraph like that, hidden away in a corner of a great newspaper, matter? It's the only one that appeared. Not one person in a thousand sees it, and those that do don't care tuppence about it. It's forgotten in five minutes and—what's the odds?"

"The people that know me see it."

"No they don't—not a tenth of them. Or, if they do, what matter?"

"Perhaps," sighed Gaunt, "it may be as you say. It may not matter. Bob!" he added, savagely, "I wish there were not one cursed newspaper left in the world!"

"Wise wish!" jeered Bob. "How would you live, then? On hay? Besides, me boy, 'tis a wish that other evil-doers, methinks, have wished before thee."

It was now nearly 12. They walked over together, presently, to the Athletic Club, where they had a fine swim in the tank, and where Gaunt got himself into some presentable traveling clothes. They had still time, they found, for a turn in the Avenue, before the train left.

The people were coming out of the churches and the Sunday parade of worshipers in their fine raiment—a sight that visitors from the suburbs find so alluring—was at its

best. The sunshine was brilliant, the air crisp, the beauty and the clothes overpowering.

"How immaculate everyone looks," commented Romney, whose own get-up was irreproachable; "with New Yorkers, the most exhilarating part of going to church seems to be the coming out of it."

"This Sunday parade," agreed Gaunt, "is always stunning; it is no wonder our country cousins rave over it. I certainly feel out of place in it to-day—in a short coat and a billy-cock hat. You are togged like a Prince of the blood royal, as usual."

"I never get into the Sunday church parade on the Avenue if I can avoid it," replied his friend, "I'm so certain to meet my tailor." He complacently inspected the skirts of his faultless frock. "That's always awkward—especially if I owe him money."

Gaunt did not hear him. He was undergoing too odd a sensation.

They were passing a very famous edifice indeed—one celebrated as the spiritual home of many millionaires. The crowd on the sidewalk prevented motion except at a snail's pace. The church steps were also thronged—with people slowly descending, or pausing to interchange salutations, before starting homeward. On one of the upper steps stood "Jimmy," chief society paragrapher of *The Fang*, arrayed as Solomon, hatted and gloved and booted to perfection's last point, and accompanied by his womenkind. "Jimmy's" face was not exactly as the face of the sphinx, for as he met the glance of the Major's former son-in-law there came into it a pained expression, half of accusation, half of offended virtue. It was, in any case, a declination of further acquaintance. It was evident that "Jimmy" had seen the *Herald* paragraph and that he could not, as a devout Episcopalian, continue to know the breaker of an important commandment. "Jimmy's" behavior, however, produced but a fraction of the sensation. For the rest of it, three persons

were responsible. They were Imogen Leal, her sister, Mrs. St. Judas, and one Mr. Dithridge, of Washington. Mrs. St. Judas, to do her justice, looked repentant—a contrition due, no doubt, to her being caught so near a church—but there was the merest suggestion of the old, dauntless twinkle in her eye. Not so with her sister, whose small gloved hand rested on the lawyer's arm—a proprietary arm, apparently. Imogen, to do her justice, also looked deeply shocked. Her costume was a poem. In her disengaged hand she carried a prayer-book of exquisite design and in her deep eyes there was utter horror and reproach. Her escort noticed her glance and its direction, and his own echoed a cold, but distinct approval. The trio had unquestionably seen the paragraph.

It was a delicious little comedy, acted there in a few seconds on the brilliant Avenue. None of its beauty was lost by the observant Mr. Romney, who knew the parties and the circumstances.

The crowd thinned and the two friends passed on. "That," continued Romney, with some satire in his sonorous bass this time, "is what you get for being really wicked. Why don't you go to church yourself, like the really good people you used to know?"

Gaunt laughed. He was much too happy by this time to care for inconsequential matters. His train was due to start in ten minutes, and in the face of that fact even the newspaper paragraph seemed a trifle. They turned at Forty-fourth Street and walked across to the station. To the man going on the journey it seemed like stepping out of Fifth Avenue into——elysium. He checked his luggage and had three minutes to spare.

"Old boy," almost sobbed Romney, fairly embracing him ere he entered the car, "goodby and good luck! Remember me to the little wife and tell her I said you'd *earned* her."

Good old Bob!—your honest, beaming face the last

pleasant sight as the train rolled away! Long may you live, and love, and sit on the dock and fish. Like the Commodore, a true man and a steadfast friend!—and when that's said, what more may one say in your praise?

CHAPTER LI

AND WHEN ALL'S SAID?—

So—it's on, now, a race over the old, familiar pathway, a stimulating rush through space, a swift flight along the shore of the shining, sleepy river. On, through the fair panorama of groves and dells, and woods all bathed in green and scarlet and gold—a very riot and crash of color—banks and trees and quaint little churches and cottages all in a whirl; and with it all, a great song in the heart, rising and pealing in harmony with the mighty orchestral eye-feast of the Autumn. On, on through the distance, every breath a delight and every mile a thanksgiving. A race, gentle sirs, as swift as science and steam may will, but to the mind of the man making it, a mere cripple's hopping—a mere lizard's crawl. Because, forsooth, with all the rushing and skirling, it is he, after all, that must *wait*. On, then, like the wind, the well-known landmarks skipping by jealously, but steadily and surely, space and time disappearing and heaven itself drawing nearer with every laggard mile.

And yet this final journey of all—anticipated so hungrily and prayed for so devoutly—was no pathway of thorns; for the moment the man calling himself Eustace Gaunt had started upon it, he had cast remembrance of misery into the same dust-heap with his shackles and stepped into the future as the Certainty painted it—a future of bliss without flow. Impatient as he might be for its end, his happiness was so supreme and so sacred that his mind could not hazard a conjecture or frame a wish. The motion of the

train was an inspiration and a delight; the whirring of the wheels the rarest music. He was going, at last, to her, to his Wife; and the sweetness of that thought would brook no company.

The recollection of his last journey over this same path—ah, how ridiculous! That, perchance, was a mere madman's trip, the irregular outcome of a fruitless longing for the impossible. Then he had seen his heaven as heaven was shown to Dives—a Heaven justly placed beyond his reach by his own acts. And in a few short months—now!—oh, marvelous! Languor vanished and an absurd energy and merriment took possession of him. He found himself forced to keep moving, and under that compulsion did childish and irrational things. He went out alone to the platform of the rear car, and with his back pressed against the woodwork and his foot to the rail, bawled rollicking love-ditties at the top of his voice to the receding rocks and trees. He pinched his muscles and slapped his chest to make sure they were still sound; and then, quite suddenly, his song would cease and subside into a prayer—a prayer, if you please, for her. Foolish—foolish, I grant you. But insanity? No, not quite. His boyhood had returned, that was all. It is a good sign.

In the car he made friends with a child, a small maid with large, serious eyes and wonderful fluffy yellow curls and a mouth like a June rose. For her entertainment, as the shadows fell, he wove a prodigious romance of castles and woods and a princess in a black gauze dress with gold stars upon it and a prince with a blue silk coat and a diamond-hilted sword who came to claim her. She was pleased, and declined, violently and tearfully, to leave him when bed-time came—a rebellion that was flattering, but provocative of much indignation in her pompous black nurse. It was this adventure, no doubt, that brought him, when he fell asleep himself, an exquisite dream of a tropical sea—moonlit, of course—with a yacht upon it, and on the deck of the yacht—Elaine, in a white dress, with a great

knot of violets at her belt. He himself was sprawling at the rail, listening to the lisp of the ripples beneath it, and the wheel was in the hands of a curly-haired choir-boy in a snowy surplice, who smiled gloriously upon them both as he sang "The Palms." A fair vision, surely, for a close berth in a Wagner sleeping-car. Yes, Love will do as much for some of us as that. Oh, on, you sluggard train, and bring us to the blessing—to the Certainty that waits!

Then in the morning, darkly, there fell upon him a sudden apprehension and terror—a terror as remorseless and horrid as his ecstasy until then had been acute. Heretofore he had had confidence—the confidence born of Faith not only in a Wife's truth but in the mercy of Heaven. He had been content to wait, and had told her to wait, and between them there had passed no word in all these months; because he held her in such reverence that he would not speak with her, or plot with her, meanly and secretly, while so much as the semblance of a claim was held upon him by some one else. Oh, idiot, idiot! what might not have happened? Illness?—trouble?—death?—no, scarcely that, or he would have heard. A million other things, though. Might she not have wavered—forgotten? Would it be strange if she had? What sublime effrontery and conceit to imagine, as he had imagined, that a good woman—any good woman!—could forgive what he had done and remain true, wife and mother though she had been, through it all! And that, too, without a word of comfort, or the knowledge, which he himself had possessed all this time, that skies were brightening, clouds passing away! He had looked on his silence towards her as honest and chivalrous. It now appeared to him as the acme of selfishness. Had he, after all, the right to leave her to wait in ignorance while he himself had the Certainty to cheer him? No, he had not. It was brutal and monstrous. She had kept silent herself because he had suggested it and because she had followed, ever since her marriage, the practice of consulting his wishes before her own. Now, for whatever she might have

done, or for whatever might have happened, he could not blame her. And now the hour for which he had waited—the hour to tell her that he was free to come to her—had nearly arrived, and he was afraid—afraid to death! Would she meet him? Would she be there?

He could not eat, or read, or rest. The buzzing of the wheels was not music to-day, but a tumult—dizzy, sickening, tremendous. He became convinced that when he stepped upon that platform there would be no dearly loved figure there for him to see, and he tried to imagine how he would bear the disappointment, and how he should arrange to see her afterwards. What if she were to refuse to meet him under any circumstances? It would not be strange. So ran the rigmarole—up and down the dismal scale of doubt and dread. It was the climax of torture, the final battle of the nerves. It dragged through the long hours wretchedly, and the train dashed on through the gorgeous Michigan woods, brilliant in the sunlight, nearer and nearer to the end—nearer and nearer to the moment of Knowing. The woods and the sun and the whirring wheels were now buzzing and clanking the one racking and all-absorbing query—"would she be there?—would she be there?"

Would she? Would she?

It must have been the flight through those woodlands superb, the indefinable, nameless charm of the West, that caused the terror to vanish as suddenly as it had come. Something told the traveler in the last few miles that Doubt now was a cowardice, and his manhood came to his aid. With the first sight of the vast, dingy city whose outskirts the train was now entering, his spirits leaped up. How foolish to fear—now!—with all Fate in his own two hands and the adorable Certainty straight ahead. Courage, man! In twenty minutes—

The little maid with the fluffy hair and the serious eyes came for a goodby kiss. He poked her in the ribs and grinned at her horribly—at which she shrieked with pleas-

ure. He looked at himself critically in a mirror to see whether he appeared sane or crazy, and then went out into the vestibule,—to count the minutes. All the fever and unrest of his entire life were concentrated in those last few tickings of a watch, but his heart was singing yet again. Something had told him not to fear. He knew she would not fail.

Ten minutes.

Five.

The long train was rolling past the high Illinois Central wall—the same wall to which he had lifted his infant son, in other years, to see other trains go by. It rolled slowly into the great station.

When he saw her, he was carrying a lot of valises and coats and umbrellas. He had looked for her without success for some moments and was taken by surprise. He dropped his burden with a crash and they clasped hands without speaking.

She was dressed in gray—a soft, sweet shade of gray that gave her figure all its girlishness and grace. Her eyes were tender but mournful. She looked lovelier, far lovelier, then she had looked on the day in June.

"I knew you would be here," was all Gaunt could say.

She disengaged her hands gently. Passengers and porters were scurrying past, and some of them stole curious looks.

They walked presently down the path along the Lake Front. At a viaduct that spanned the railway they paused and leaned, side by side, on the parapet.

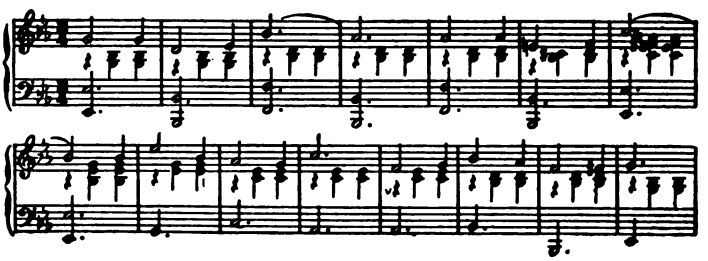
Not a breath of air was stirring. The lake lay shiny and glassy in the afternoon sun. From where they stood Gaunt could see the line of carriages in Michigan Avenue and the old Richelieu; and he recalled the afternoon when he had seen the hotel from the steamer and wished his wife would wave him a farewell from the steps.

They talked together, and, very earnestly and reverently, the man made his plea.

Elaine showed him a printed newspaper fragment that she drew from an envelope with trembling fingers. "Sonny, dear," she said, in a queer, little choking voice, "I shall always love you, but I can't marry you. Don't you see?—YOU COULD NOT EVEN BE FAITHFUL TO HER!"

He glanced at the envelope from which the slip had been taken: It was addressed to her in a handwriting that he knew—the handwriting of Agnes Gaunt. The slip was from the New York *Herald*.

In the morning he went back to New York, wondering what he should do next.



THE END

MAY 2 8 1930